UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER

The Counsellor's Experience of Aloneness

And Its Impact on The Therapeutic Relationship:

A Heuristic Study

MA in Counselling Studies

Lorraine Phillips

Dissertation submitted to the University of Chester for the Degree of Master of Arts

(Counselling Studies) in part fulfilment of the Modular Programme in Counselling Studies

August 2019

ABSTRACT:

Aims and Method:
This small scale study explored counsellors' experiences of aloneness and how this influenced the therapeutic relationship. The research was conducted within a qualitative paradigm and used a heuristic methodology. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with four therapists who had expressed an interest in exploring their perceptions of this phenomenon. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from these dialogues.

Findings:
Two overarching themes emerged from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013): *Personal experience of aloneness* and *Awareness of aloneness and the therapeutic space (the therapist's perspective)*. Seven themes were highlighted under these two main headings: *aloneness provides space, aloneness affects attachments, aloneness as a choice, the uniqueness of aloneness experience, aloneness is not always understood by others, how aloneness affects the therapeutic relationships*, and the final theme is *aloneness and self-care as a therapist.*

Conclusion:
Our experiences of aloneness are unique and complex and how these encounters are defined, and the *skills* needed to *be* alone, are still little understood. This investigation explored individual experience of aloneness and has provided insight into how the phenomenon affects relationships with clients in the therapeutic space. It adds to a general conversation on loneliness, aloneness and solitude, and shines a light on the little researched association of our alone experiences impacting on the counselling relationship.

Key Words: Aloneness, Therapeutic Relationship, Counsellor

Declaration:

This work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.

Signed:

Acknowledgements:

I would like to say thank you and extend my deepest gratitude to:

- All the participants who have shared their experiences for this study. Their patience, engagement and generosity is greatly appreciated.
- My research supervisor, Dr Rita Mintz. Her understanding, support, encouragement and unlimited patience has been a source of strength.
- Family and friends, for their encouragement, shared experiences and insight.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABBREVIATIONS

CoR(i) Jo, CoR (ii) Sam, CoR (iii) Jamie & CoR (iv) Alex	Refers to the four participants/co-researchers. used in the *discussion of findings* section, referring to their verbatim data.
……..	Indicates a pause in dialogue, or a break in verbatim dialogue.

This is a populous world, and we are most often alone in a crowd.
It is a state of body then mind. The word alone should not, for us,
find cold and hollow, but hot. Pulsating with potentiality…
This word wants rescuing, this word wants pride.
This word wants to be washed and shined.

(Rufus, 2003, p. xix)

Chapter I: Introduction: *seeking to illuminate*: *initial engagement*

The intention of this qualitative study is to gain a deep and detailed insight into the lived experience of aloneness from the perspective of the counsellor, to explore individual meaning, and to add to a conversation on how this manifests in the therapeutic space (Moustakas, 1961, 1972, 2004; Storr, 1997; McLeod, 2011, 2015). I have chosen a qualitative paradigm and heuristic methodology because of the focus on process rather than outcome (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). The heuristic process is "autobiographic" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15) and begins with the researcher seeking to discover and illuminate a question. Alongside the self-examination and engagement through the stages of heuristic process, the inquiry widens to include the experiences of others. Moustakas suggested if we are to understand the experience of others we "must converse directly with the persons" and "encourage the other to express, explore and explicate the meanings that are within his or her experience" (p. 26). In this study four participants/co-researchers have shared their understanding and reflections during semi-structured interviews (Moustakas, 1990).

Personal interest in aloneness:

Aloneness is fundamental to human experience. For me, it is intriguing and an enlightening part of life. Aloneness, alone time and solitude evoke similar experiences, though I am aware for others these experiences are defined differently. My experiences are not usually equated to loneliness or separation from others in an undesirable sense, though there is potential for this. Mostly it is a space for self-exploration, reflection, meditation and to check-in with what is happening physically, emotionally and psychologically.

There have been times when aloneness has challenged my sense of self and been a difficult place to reside. Storr (1997) suggested "…that what goes on in the human being when he is by himself is as important as what happens in his interactions with other people" (p. xiv), and

> *"…the creative person is constantly seeking to discover himself, to remodel his own identity, and to find meaning in the universe through what he creates… his most significant moments are those in which he attains some new insight, or makes some new discovery; and these moments are chiefly, if not invariably those in which he is alone," (pp. xiv).*

He proposed that a preoccupation with *internal processes* is associated with the more gifted, and this may "reveal something about the needs of the less gifted, more ordinary human being" (p. xv), which he felt was neglected. What resonates with me is the connection to creativity and the search to discover meaning, and its association with being alone.

Some of my early memories of aloneness are associated with unwelcome and confusing experiences. I wanted to be alone whilst also wanting to be with others. I found this conflicting and challenging to understand (Larson, 1990; Maes, Vanhalst, Spithoven, Van den Nootgate & Goossens, 2015). These feelings were discordant and led to self-judgement and anxiety. I also perceived judgements from others as I tried to navigate my way through. To explain further, I felt my aloneness was strange and different from how I observed others. I wanted, and needed, alone space, however this felt at odds with what I experienced as *normal* behaviour (Larson, 1990; Luxmoore, 2014). Research (Larson, 1990; Luxmoore, 2014; Maes et al., 2015) has suggested this conflict in adolescence as natural at a time of change and identity exploration. At this time in my life, I felt I had to try to be part of a group and at home find space. It was a struggle. I wanted to have friends and to fit in. I felt conflicted with the task to find both and to achieve a balance.

When I have reflected on childhood experiences from the vantage point of adult insight, I have understood my relationship with aloneness to be a shifting and fluctuating one (Knafo, 2012). Aloneness can be all these things: creative, destructive, joyous, painful, meaningful and lonely. In youth, my memories of aloneness were sometimes associated with fear, loneliness and sadness (Winnicott, 1958). Often, I did not feel there was a choice. It was also an imaginative and reflective space (Storr, 1997). Albert Einstein encapsulated part of my experience when he wrote “I live in that solitude which is painful in youth, but delicious in the years of maturity” (Einstein, 2011, p. 7). I would

suggest, perhaps presumptuously yet from my experience thus far, that the years of maturity also contain pain though different to that of my youth.

Through this process of inquiry, I have reflected on my experience of aloneness and how it has been connected to understanding my life. I have encountered adverse experiences, such as bullying in school and the workplace, and this has impacted on my relationship with aloneness. As I suggested above, aloneness has not always felt like a choice. It has felt oppressive at times, and I have felt abandoned and overwhelmed. At these times aloneness has become loneliness. This has contrasted with experiences of joy in aloneness, which has felt more positive and the bonds created with people have been trustworthy.

Background and Current Context to the Research Question:

There has been an exponential interest and discourse on aloneness and related phenomenon in recent years. I am aware as I have *tuned in* and immersed myself in the experience, as part of the heuristic process (Moustakas, 1990), that my antennae are picking up on these signals. I believe a more general interest in how we experience aloneness has increased. We are questioning our human experience of what it is *to be alone* and *by one's self,* in particular relating to being physically alone, alongside feelings of loneliness. Research suggests, "Aloneness has suddenly captured the attention of psychology" (Detrixhe, Wallner Samstag, Penn & Wong, 2014, p. 310). This *elevated* awareness has gone beyond psychological study to become a conversation, particularly in Western cultures.

Awareness of aloneness has been raised through charities such as the *Campaign to End Loneliness*, newspaper/magazine articles and social media. Television programmes such as *The Age of Loneliness* (Bourne, 2016) addressed aloneness and claimed that one in four of us will live alone during our lifetime. BBC Radio 4's *All in the Mind's* survey on loneliness (Rutherford & Washbourne, 2018) proposed that stereotyping occurs. There is a belief that it strikes mainly older and more isolated people, yet their findings contended 40% of 16 to 24-year-olds felt lonely much of the time, compared with 27% of over 75s. These findings indicated higher loneliness experiences in young people across cultures, countries, and genders.

The government appointment of a ministerial lead on *loneliness* in April 2017 acknowledged a political impetus to tackle the perceived 'crisis'. *A Connected Society* (The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018) was produced in response to recommendations from the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness (2017). This strategy purported to be a first step to end loneliness and to laying some foundations for change (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018). The emergent term *the lonely epidemic* (US Health Resources and Services Administration, 2019) has been adopted in the UK in recent years, certainly by the media. It has raised questions about how we navigate alone experiences during our lifespan and how to manage this as a social problem. The debate has provided a wider perspective to my endeavour and what may be present in the therapeutic space, brought into the *room* by both counsellor and client.

Aim of the study:

Simply put, the aim is to add to the discussion about the individual lived experience of aloneness (McLeod, 2011 & 2015). My personal focus is to explore how this relates to the therapeutic space (Moustakas, 1990). I am impassioned to understand this phenomenon further, from others' perspectives and by "turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme that is human experience" (p. 24).

Dissertation question and structure:

My question is:

The Counsellor's Experience Of Aloneness And Its Impact On The Therapeutic Relationship: A Heuristic Study.

I began this research with self-inquiry, immersing myself in the first stage of the heuristic process with personal questions about aloneness. I was curious about what would emerge from asking my question (Moustakas, 1990; Witt, 2000). I knew this was a vast task for a 16,000-word dissertation, and my decision to narrow the search took this into account. The journeys of four volunteer co-researchers (as well as one *pilot* volunteer) added to this exploration, as 'the eyes and voices' of others deepen and extend our understanding (Rogers, 1969, in Moustakas, 1990).

This research was an opportunity for insight, and whatever may arise … and was my starting point.

In chapter I, I explore my personal journey to this research question setting the context along with some terminologies associated with aloneness. In chapter II, I review existing literature and terms closely associated with this experience. Chapter III examines the methodology underpinning the investigation and the reasons I have chosen a qualitative paradigm and heuristic process. Chapter IV is where the themes that have emerged from the interviews with co-researchers are presented, and within this the lived experience and personal perspectives on how this relates to the therapeutic space. Chapter V offers a discussion of the findings in relation to relevant literature. The Creative Synthesis in Chapter VI presents a personal creative exploration in the form of poetry, diary entries and artwork, and summarises my experiences during the heuristic process. In Chapter VII, I present a brief conclusion to the study and acknowledge limitations of this investigation.

Summary:

I have given an overview of my personal interest in aloneness and the therapeutic relationship, why I have chosen to explore the question, and how this is relevant within the wider context of the counselling world and as a phenomenon in society.

Every effort that has been directed toward avoiding loneliness has failed,
and will fail, because it is again the fundaments of life.
What is needed is not something in which you can forget your loneliness.
What is needed is that you become aware of your aloneness.

(Osho, 2001, p. 169)

Chapter II: Literature Review: *immersion and incubation*

Introduction:

This process of immersion began by engaging with aloneness (Moustakas, 1990). I explored anecdotal and academic material via textbooks, journal and newspaper articles, databases, and through poetry, music, philosophy and spirituality. This provided a foundation from which to build an understanding of how this phenomenon was experienced (Moustakas, 1990). Only then, did I feel I could hone my attention to the literature directly pertinent to my specific question.

I start this review by explaining the search strategies applied and provide an overview of the literature search and aloneness. This is followed by the relevant literature under headings indicating the main areas related to my question.

Literature search strategy:

I started with a general online computer search via engines such as Google, followed by an online library search for general texts on counselling and therapy, aloneness and associated concepts and keywords. This was conducted to get close to as much material as possible (Moustakas, 1990; Kenny, 2010) before I accessed academic databases. I

used keywords, alternative words associated with aloneness and the therapeutic relationship, and a thesaurus to aid the process, together with Boolean operators AND, OR and NOT; truncations and wild cards were used to capture as much relevant literature as possible. I searched databases, Ebsco, ProQuest and OpenAthens, to broaden and narrow the search. Through these, I accessed CINAHL, pyscINFO, psycARTICLES, psycBOOKS, SocINDEX, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, and nursing, psychology and psychiatry journals. I retrieved information from ResearchGate, Google Scholar and Chester Rep. I limited my database searches to books and e-books, Masters and PhD dissertations and peer reviewed journals/e-journals. I sourced those I could access in full text, as well as abstracts when full access was not available. One source of note (Nguyen, Weinstein & Ryan, 2019) was in the process of being peer reviewed and is included due to its significance to my question. Further sources were derived from reference sections in the literature, helping to cross-reference and affirm relevant and commonly used sources had been covered.

General overview of literature search:

The literature suggested our interpretation and experiences of aloneness was diverse. There was agreement about the lack of research into our capacity to be alone (Long & Averill 2003; Rokach, 2004), and ambiguity around what *skills* were needed (Long & Averill 2003). Aloneness encompassed both adverse and beneficial experience (Storr, 1997; Moustakas, 1990) and perhaps is part of a continuum, with loneliness and isolation at one end of the spectrum and creativity and healing at the other. However, this explanation may be too rudimentary as our experience of aloneness is affected by

other considerations. The literature proposed there were more complex influences such as: early experiences and attachments (Winnicott, 1958; Bretherton, 1992), physical and psychological health through the lifespan (Long & Averill, 2003), cultural and societal attitudes (Storr, 1997) and our social and physical environment (Rokach, 2004). These issues affected our perceptions of aloneness and had the potential to influence our well-being to a wider extent. This will be explored further in the following review.

There was plentiful research relating to the therapeutic relationship, the value and importance of the alliance in a counselling and therapeutic environment, along with factors that may impact on this (Rogers, 2002; Norcross, 2010; Norcross & Lambert, 2011; Satir, 2013). I conducted an exhaustive search to find literature relating aloneness to the therapeutic relationship, yet I found few specific references. I do not suggest this research does not exist, yet the challenge I experienced increases the relevance of this study to the conversation (McLeod, 2015)

Aloneness: An overview

As human beings we need relationships with others. A lack of connection can be painful and lonely (Moustakas, 1961). According to Rokach (2004), intimate relationships and quality in our human contact were increasingly a scarcity in modern society. Although we yearn for closeness and companionship “everyone seems to be having trouble finding it” (p. 28). There was a paradox. Rokach (2004) studied the effects of loneliness on daily living in North America and found that feeling lonely when being alone was an “all-too-familiar way of life” (p. 27). Her research suggested that feeling lonely when we

were alone was a difficult experience, however being alone in company was a much worse prospect.

In Western culture there is a pressure and expectation to be sociable and if we struggle to do this, we can feel flawed and failures as individuals. Larson (1990) suggested 'the average person' had feelings of unhappiness and negative feelings associated with loneliness when alone. Williams (2017) found that "aloneness is often viewed as a necessary but dreaded part of human existence" (p. 16). So, why is this?

Aloneness is experienced throughout our lifetime. This may begin in early childhood when we become aware of our separateness from others (Winnicott, 1958). Adolescence is regarded as a time when the tensions between individual identity and social connection can be associated with an increase in lonely feelings and aloneness (Maes et al., 2015; Luxmoore, 2014). In later life aloneness can be influenced by less social contact due to the loss of friends and family, and changes in health due to illness and less mobility. Aloneness is not always associated with adverse experiences or loneliness. It is sought out as time for creativity and healing (Storr, 1997; Osho, 2001; Rokach, 2004). Whatever our experience of aloneness, difficult or pursued and beneficial, the literature suggested understanding these experiences, and the *skills* required to be alone, are still little understood (Rokach, 2004; Thomas, 2017)

Defining aloneness:

Aloneness can be described as physically being on one's own, or an emotional state of feeling alone. Rokach (2004) found that being alone "may be a purely cognitive experience, a geographical reality, or a crisis in one's life" (p. 29). It could also be chosen for self-exploration, freedom to be with oneself, and to express creativity (Storr, 1997; Buchholz, 1997, 1999; Long & Averill, 2003). The more positive aspects of aloneness could be viewed as solitude and distinct from adverse aloneness experience or loneliness (Storr, 1997). One dictionary definition of alone(ness) suggested being alone was

- *having no one else present; on one's own; isolated; lonely (en.oxforddictionaries.com)*

Another defined it as being

- *to the exclusion of all other or all else; unique; unequalled; unexcelled; solitarily, solely, only, exclusively, without aid or help (dictionary.com)*

These definitions could be observed as negative or positive dependent on individual perceptions, and alongside the synonyms, antonyms and other words related to aloneness below (Table 1), give some context to the difficulty and subjectivity of defining the experience. This list was compiled from various dictionaries, web searches and wider reading to illustrate some of the terms associated with aloneness experiences.

Table 1

Words related to aloneness

❖ Alone	❖ Connectedness
❖ Solitude	❖ Associated
❖ Loneliness	❖ Social
❖ Seclusion	❖ Together
❖ Separateness	❖ Attached
❖ Detached	❖ Creativity
❖ Privacy	❖ Companionship
❖ Isolation	❖ Being with
❖ Introversion	❖ Extroversion
❖ Loss	❖ Joined
❖ Single	❖ Spirituality
❖ Loner	❖ Meditation
❖ Unaccompanied	❖ Freedom
❖ Remoteness	❖ Private
❖ Seclusion	❖ Without
❖ Being Alone	❖ Introverted

Some context to the exploration of aloneness:

Philosophers, artists and great 'thinkers' have deliberated over the centuries on aloneness, together with associated phenomena *solitude* and *loneliness*. Aristotle's

speculative on humans as social beings purports that, "… anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god", suggesting a more binary attitude to aloneness and social abilities (Jowett, 1999, p. 6). French thinker Blaise Pascal, writing in the 1600s, suggested that the unhappiness of humanity stems from an individual's inability to sit quietly in a room alone (Knafo, 2012; Burkman, 2014). Similarly, existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre contended that you are not in good company if you are lonely when you are alone (Sartre, 2012). This notion of aloneness being associated with challenge and difficulty aligned with Canadian writer and painter Emily Carr's experience (2006), symbolising her aloneness as an all-encompassing lonely journey:

> *"I wonder will death be much lonelier than life. Life's an awfully lonesome affair. You can live close against other people yet your lives never touch. You come into the world alone and you go out of the world alone, yet it seems to me you are more alone while living that even going and coming." (p. 69)*

In his seminal research Moustakas (1961) suggested loneliness was "a condition of human life, an experience of being human which enables the individual to sustain, extend and deepen his humanity" (p. ix). He contended that

> *"In being alone I can keep in touch with my own thinking and know more surely that my thoughts are coming from me and not from someone else. Hopefully, I can pursue my life in a way that will enhance my growth and lead to significant learning, based on the voices within rather than from without" (p.19).*

Moustakas argued this *existential loneliness* is an experience and rather than hiding from this "fundamental truth" and denying its existence, we get to know ourselves "as an isolated and solitary individual" (p. 24). When we become separated from ourselves "as a feeling and knowing person" (p. 24) the result was *loneliness anxiety,* a distressing state of disconnection and fear of being alone (Moustakas, 1972; Rokach, 2004). There was a potential for growth and creation within *existential loneliness* which could emerge from feelings of pain and desolation.

Knafo (2012) found that aloneness and loneliness were not the same, instead presenting aloneness as a positive space, with the potential to offer calmness and inner strength. Similarly, Williams (2017) found solitude to be a "positive aloneness, a sought out and enjoyable experience that was not usually associated with negative emotions" (p.17). Rubenstein and Shaver (1982, in Rokach, 2004) suggested that solitude helped to assuage feelings of loneliness, seeing it as something that prepared us for intimacy in relationships with "its calming effect on us, its enhancement of our ability to distinguish genuine from false needs for contact with others" (p. 31), its central role to prepare us for social responsibility and intimacy. Storr (1997) argued that many gifted and artistic individuals sought solitude and time alone for creativity, not avoiding it due to the painful feelings of *loneliness anxiety* suggested by Moustakas (1972).

So, how we experience *our* aloneness can be unpredictable and inconsistent through our life span (Long & Averill, 2003), and the experience is subjective. The terminology referred to above in Table 1 has the potential for different individual meanings and

interpretations. This adds to the difficulty and challenge of defining aloneness. There is also a distinction for some between the terms *being alone*, *aloneness, solitude* and *loneliness*. Where I have understood terms as distinct, I have respected this, otherwise I have assumed solitude and aloneness to be similar.

However this phenomenon is defined, experiences of aloneness are inevitable. Each of us is alone in our experience, and it is from that place of aloneness that we connect with others (Knafo, 2012). What we feel when alone we may feel in relationships (Winnicott, 1958; Knafo, 2012). Ultimately, the two phenomena are interwoven (Moustakas, 1990; Long & Averill, 2003; Spillers, 2007).

Aloneness can be *voluntarily* chosen or *enforced*, by ourselves and others (Knafo, 2012). It can be detrimental to our well-being, or it can be fulfilling. Furthermore, Knafo suggested that both can be uncertain experiences; *enforced* aloneness, whilst appearing initially negative, may develop into a blessing, and *voluntary* aloneness can become a penance. She proposed that aloneness and relationship are "in constant dialogue with one another" (p. 94), our individual experiences in constant flux, impacting on any relationships; accordingly, both parties in the therapeutic relationship.

These emerging issues above are the basis for further exploration of the literature related to my question.

Aloneness: Attitudes to aloneness experiences

General attitudes:

Aloneness and solitary experience are often perceived as negative, to be avoided, remedied and fixed in some way (Storr 1997; Andersson, Denhov, Bülow, & Topor, 2014; Maitland, 2014; Williams, 2017). However, aloneness and solitude can be phenomena to embrace and find freedom in (Storr, 1997; Moustakas, 1961). Winnicott (1958) proposed the foundation for our experiences was dependent on our *capability to be alone* and the early infant/caregiver attachment had a continuing effect on these (Long & Averill, 2003), and influenced whether our experiences of aloneness and solitude were positive or negative.

From her research findings Thomas (2017) proposed development of *Alone Theory* (Bucholz, 1997; Bucholz & Helbraun, 1999). The concept claimed that spending time alone is a biological and socio-emotional need which fosters emotional growth, intimacy and relationships (Winnicott, 1958; Bucholz, 1997). Thomas (2017) suggested further exploration of the precise skills required to develop this *capacity to be alone*. She cautioned that the benefits of aloneness were little discussed, and "…the skills needed to transform alone time into a positive solitude experience rather than an isolating, terrifying one, remain unspecified" (p. 1). Her findings suggested that identifying the purposes of solitude, and the skills needed for it to be 'used constructively', could be done initially by distinguishing between solitude and loneliness. These terms, though interrelated can be confusing to demarcate, with different meanings assumed based on subjective experience.

Cultural influences:

Wanting to spend time alone could be perceived as a lonely experience in any age group. There are individuals for whom aloneness is a nourishing process as suggested previously (Moustakas, 1961, 1972; Storr, 1997; Maitland, 2014), and others for whom it is a painful and misanthropic pastime (Larson, 1997; Knafo, 2012). Our cultural heritage can influence our perception. Western society projects a general negative attitude towards spending time alone (Burger, 1995; Storr, 1997). As our culture shapes the attitudes we have of aloneness and our relationship with it, this is an important factor influencing how it is regarded, perceived and experienced (Knafo, 2012). In some non-Western cultures aloneness is approached differently. Some Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, emphasise aloneness as offering an opportunity to explore inner power and serenity.

In the counselling and psychotherapy field, Sigmund Freud regarded solitude as a negative experience (Knafo, 2012) likening it to darkness and anxiety, further suggesting that spending time alone was associated with characteristics of so-called psychological *disorders* (Burger, 1995). Storr (1997) purported that people in industrialised Western cultures have lost the capacity to use alone time constructively, and Suedfeld (1982) suggested we have been *trained* to believe that aloneness is best avoided.

Aloneness: Our capacity to be alone

Early aloneness experiences and attachment:

Long and Averill's (2003) paper into the benefits of being alone supported the view that early attachment experiences influenced our ability and capacity to be alone. These early influences impact upon whether our experiences of aloneness could be perceived as constructive or adverse in later life. This strengthens the supposition that a securely attached child would develop though adolescence to a securely attached adult (Winnicott, 1958; Bowlby, 2007) comfortable with solitude. Anxiously attached adults however were more likely to be afraid, and someone with an avoidant attachment style would choose aloneness over intimate relationships (Long & Averill's, 2003).

Burger (1995) suggested spending time alone during adolescence boosts a sense of well-being and self-reflectiveness. This supported Larson's suggestion (1990) that moderate time alone during adolescence appeared to relate to better adjusted adults, compared to those who spent too little or too much time in solitary occupation. The argument purported that alone time allowed for young people to come to terms with the conflicts and identity issues of adolescence, work out values and engage in self-understanding (Erikson, 1968). Maes et al. (2015) suggested that even though each individual had a different experience these are "particularly salient in adolescence when many changes in cognitive ability and social relationships occur" (p.3), and this age group spent increasing time alone alongside the tensions of identity development. The impact of relationships with parents and peers both positively and negatively influenced attitudes of lonely feelings. Their research proposed there is a decrease in negative attitudes from

early adolescence onwards, yet excessive time alone may "increase feelings of loneliness when adolescents miss important opportunities for social interactions" (p.4).

Personality Type:

Nguyen, Weinstein and Ryan (2019, under review), explored whether our capacity to be alone can be explained by personality *type* categories, such as *introverted* or *extroverted,* and how this influenced our preference for being alone or with others. Larson's (1997) paper referred to this as a *reactive* or *constructive* solitude. He argued that *reactive solitude* was the motivation to spend time as a response to how one feels around others, and *constructive solitude* motivated more by a desire to want alone time, as it was perceived as useful and attractive. The former is judged as psychologically asocial, and the latter healthy and 'normal' behaviour.

Nguyen et al. (2019, under review) analysed the Big Five Theory (extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience), Attachment Theory and Self-Determinist Theory to understand why people seek out solitude, and if the desire to be alone is related to the desire *not* to be with others. They disputed the widely held view that extroverts don't like solitude and aloneness and introverts do, by exploring characteristics associated with this capacity to be alone. They suggested that "…contrary to common notion that solitary enjoyment is characteristic of asocial individuals, it is those who tend to behave and act according to their values and beliefs that value and enjoy solitude more" (p. 2). They concluded that it is related more to

individual autonomy and an interest in learning about personal experiences, than any connection with a particular personality type.

A further observation was that extroversion and introversion were not a clear-cut measurement to assess the enjoyment of spending time alone. Nguyen et al. (2019, under review) pointed to research suggesting there was no correlation between people who enjoyed being with others enjoying solitude less (Zelenski, Sobocko & Whelan, 2014), nor that people identified as introverts had more positive experience of time spent alone than extroverts, if they had reported a less positive experience of social interactions (Srivastava, Angelo & Vallereux, 2008). This research suggested there is a correlation between individuals interested in their own experiences and more consistently in touch with congruent feelings (Rogers, 2002; Huitt, 2007). These individuals are more able to relate to enjoyment from solitude for its own sake. They would choose aloneness for its positive qualities (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Health and Wellbeing:

Aloneness (and loneliness) have been examined in relation to psychological issues, where experiences may affect, and be affected by, our wellbeing. This may include those who are, for example, experiencing trauma, addictions, low mood or experiences of disconnection (Pierce, Wilkinson & Anderson, 2003; Beal, 2006). One study looked at persistent loneliness in individuals who have been given a *medical diagnosis* of 'borderline personality disorder', where their subjective feelings of being alone were measured. The study referred to evidence suggesting that social isolation and low social performance contributed to loneliness (Liebke, Bungert, Thome, Hauschild, Gescher,

Schmahl, Lis & Bohus, 2017). Beal (2006) and Pierce, Wilkinson and Anderson (2003) explored aloneness experiences of older women with low mood (depression). Beal argued that loneliness was an area of concern for older women, with implications for health and wellbeing; these experiences were also affected by life changes and loss as part of the life span. Pierce et al. (2003) suggested that their participants viewed aloneness differently as they recovered from confusion and helplessness to resourceful and more self-reliant.

Aloneness: Choice

It may be a consequence of existing psychological distress that determines how we experience aloneness (Andersson et al., 2014); we may struggle with social situations (Thomas, 2017), or we may be content (Storr, 1997). This can influence whether we feel there is choice, or it has been imposed on us (Knafo, 2012). Research into our capacity as humans to spend time by ourselves exposed themes that have emerged already: attachment, life span, culture, our ability to be alone, values and beliefs (Winnicott, 1958; Nguyen et al., 2019; Burger, 1990; Storr, 1997).

Knafo (2012) found those who chose to spend time in creative activity that required private space derived a sense of self-worth and meaning from these experiences. She argued that our ability to engage in a relationship with aloneness is the platform from which we connect with others. Our relationship with aloneness was complex, and though growthful for some, it was destructive and unhealthy for others. Knafo advised both states are in flux and overspill any static categories. Burger (1995) concurred that

aloneness is connected to a need or desire for privacy as well as relationship. He perceived this as different from solitude or aloneness. He assumed people varied in the extent they preferred time alone, and this private time could be chosen as personal space or with family. It could be seen more broadly as regulating and controlling the amount of information we disclosed about ourselves.

Aloneness: Connection

Rokach (2012) contended that we longed for close relationships and companionship, a yearning for connection and intimacy that was with us through our life (Fromm-Reichmann, 1959; Winnicott, 1958). Yalom (1980) stated that no matter how close and intimate these relationships were, there was a gap that could not be bridged. Spillers' findings (2007) suggested "our separateness is our aloneness" (p. 3), yet we strive for connection. It would be a mistake to think of relationships and aloneness as being opposing states. Knafo (2012) found "when we are alone, we are still with others; and when with others, we are still alone" (p. 84). She contended that this applied to solitude and aloneness because "nearly everything that can we feel alone can be felt in relationship" (p. 5); as we are unique in our experience of aloneness and relationship, so each of us will have a different balance to meet these individual needs.

In her paper exploring aloneness as part of loneliness in grief, Spillers (2007) discovered a distinction between some experiences of aloneness and loneliness and how this impacted on connection in our relationships. She identified *existential aloneness* and *emotional loneliness*: the former a state of a physical being, "a physical body, separate

from other entities" (p.193), the latter, feeling disconnected from others and ourselves and a longing to be in relationship with someone outside of our experience. Spillers (2007) found that existential aloneness "does not imply social isolation or disconnection because humans are social and interdependent beings" (p. 194). She contended that our existential aloneness can be a place of fear and anxiety, as although others may be present to support any change we may face in life "we face our changes alone" (p. 194). Our fear of aloneness and solitude are profoundly associated with the emotions that arise when we are alone, and our need and longing to escape these feelings.

Spillers (2007) proposed that our relational framework gave us a sense of belonging, and that we needed to stave off the potential emotional turbulence that may occur with emotional loneliness. Long & Averill (2003) came to a similar conclusion, that if we drew on personal resources and maintained feelings of connection and relatedness with others, aloneness could be experienced for potential benefit and not become something detrimental to our well-being.

Aloneness: The Therapeutic Relationship

The therapeutic relationship is at the heart of counselling and should not be underestimated (Paul & Haugh, 2008). Paul and Haugh pointed to over a thousand studies and forty years of research reflecting the power of the therapeutic connection (Orlinsky, Grawe & Parks, 1994, in Paul & Haugh, 2008) and the factors affecting the outcomes of therapy, one being the *therapeutic bond*. Paul and Haugh argued that engagement, rapport and positive regard, as well as relational congruence (Rogers,

2002) are key factors. They suggested that “the relationship is significant to therapeutic change in every model of therapy”, and “there is an increasing focus on relationship factors across all models”, with “clear evidence that positive relational factors must be present regardless of therapeutic model” (p. 248). Similarly, Baldwin Jr. (2013) stated that there is an “increasing acceptance among therapists that there is something in the unique nature of the therapeutic relationship and the person of the therapist that plays a critical role in the process of therapy” (p. 65).

Norcross (2010) asked the question: what is the most important factor in the success of therapy? He suggested 80% of therapists would say “the relationship” (p. 113), and this is the cornerstone, though not exclusive, to the outcomes of therapy. He defined the client-therapist relationship as central, with the attitude both therapist and client have toward each another as significant, be this in communication by words or in silence.

Baldwin Jr (2013) explored Martin Buber’s beliefs about the essence of *I-Thou* in relationship, being one “into which both parties enter in the fullness of their being with a sense of and appreciation for the subject and object in each” (p. 70). This contrasts to an *I-It*, or subject-object, relationship “in which others are regarded as mere tools or conveniences”. The *I-Thou* relationship experienced as “immediate and unmediated… always there … waiting to be touched, released, known”. It is a responding to another and “the act of confirming the other (p. 70). For Buber, the greatest thing one human could do for another was to confirm the “deepest thing within him or her. It is this act of confirmation which is ultimately implied in the use of self in therapy” (p.79). Buber

suggested the therapeutic relationship could not offer this fully, because although a genuine dialogue and authenticity may be in the relationship, there was a power dynamic that was not one of equality.

Satir (2013) claimed that the therapist needed to recognise their power and not use it negatively. She suggested that while no therapist would willingly want to harm a client, knowing oneself in the relationship is important. The relationship has been recognised as central to the *healing* process in counselling. Geller (2017) suggested when the relationship deepens to a more profound connection, there is potential for it to become, "something that is larger than both of us" (p. 199). This can be a spiritual experience, one that is transformative where client and counsellor related authentically. Geller (referred to Buber's argument that *spiritual electricity* surged in this genuine connection. The synchronicity between therapist and client was a portal for healing.

In her exploration of deeper connection, Knox (2008) referred to *relational depth* or *presence*. Knox suggested that client's and therapist's understanding and experience of the relationship is significant and argued there is little research on the former. Norcross (2010) stated that each client is different, and what they *need* from therapy differs. He emphasised that therapists need to pay attention to creating a relationship collaboratively with clients "to be responsive to clients' requests and needs" (p.129). He concurred with Knox (2008) that research on the client experience is insufficient, concluding there is a need to "customize the relationship… to the particular client and context. Simultaneously use what works. Avoid what does not. Capitalize on what

decades of research and millions of clients have told us: Nurture the therapeutic relationship" (Norcross, 2010, p. 134).

Issues arising in the alliance:

Knafo's (2012) findings suggested a need to be aware of our personal balance of relationship and aloneness, so we don't impose our needs on our client. Satir (2013) believed that it is common sense to believe that the therapist and the client will affect each other as human beings: "the therapist is clearly identified as a self-interacting with another self" (p. 24). Without awareness of this balance, the potential existed to affect a separation in the relationship and rupture the therapeutic alliance. These interruptions with the relationship could vary in intensity from relatively minor tensions, of which both of the participants may be vaguely aware, to major breakdowns in understanding and communication. The latter, if not addressed, may lead to a premature end (Pinkerton, 2008, p. 236).

The power dynamic inherent within counselling, and the clinicalisation of therapeutic relationships has raised concerns about the therapist being promoted as "*expert* healer of the human condition" (Paul & Haugh, 2008, p. 252). "The manualisation of a cure for human distress, by its very nature, detracts from the therapeutic relationship. It continues an I-IT relationship at the cost of a potential I-Thou" (p. 254). The client's viewpoint needs to be heard more if we are to understand what works in therapy (Knox, 2008; Norcross, 2010; Norcross & Lambert, 2011). This is a current debate within psychiatry, psychology and the counselling/psychotherapy community. The

introduction of The Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018) is challenging medical and more diagnostic approaches to understanding human distress, emotional trauma and wellbeing.

Summary:

I have explored different perspectives within philosophy, art and literature, psychotherapy, nursing, psychology and neuroscience; all curious about our experiences of being alone and what it means. Notably from this review, there is a suggestion of how difficult it is to define aloneness, and to assess its distinction from other phenomena. Aloneness is evidently related to other phenomena such as solitude and loneliness, as well as to relationships and connecting with others (Storr, 1997; Moustakas, 1990, 1994). It feels important to make reference to alternative perspectives to the 'medical model approach' referred to in some of the studies and suggest that there are alternate ways to describe and understand what has happened to individuals who are distressed (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). Though this review has highlighted research related to aloneness and the therapeutic relationship, there is a paucity of research on aloneness impacting the therapeutic connection, which this study aims to address.

One always dies too soon — or too late. And yet, life is there, finished:
the line is drawn, and it must all be added up. You are
nothing other than your life.

(Jean Paul Sartre, No Exit, Inès, Act 1, sc. 5)

Chapter III: Methodology: *immersion and incubation*

Qualitative or quantitative?

Although there is no single research method superior to another, the dominance of objectivity associated with quantitative methods has influenced qualitative research (Jootun, McGhee & Marland, 2009; McLeod, 2015). "Qualitative research is about meaning, not numbers" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 20). It is contextual and values the subjective lived experiences through first-person accounts. This exploration hopes to capture some of the essence of how aloneness is experienced and how this impacts the therapeutic relationship. I feel pulled intuitively towards qualitative research as it fits my values and beliefs about human experience and how we understand ourselves (Etherington, 2004). I am a humanistic and person-centred practitioner, passionate to understand phenomenological experience that accompanies the underlying journey of discovery and of being human (Finlay, 2009). A qualitative paradigm and heuristic methodology equate with these philosophies.

Qualitative inquiry is referred to being one of *indwelling* (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This process requires us to get as close up as possible to the *thing* to be understood "to *indwell in the thing*, and to reflect on it critically and creatively" (p. 39). The data harvested from qualitative and heuristic enquiry complements the motivation for this study to "become more familiar with the phenomenon of interest, to achieve a deep

understanding of how people think about a topic and to describe in great detail the perspectives of the research participants" (Hemachandra, 2014, p. 306). I am not looking for a single answer, but to capture the subjectivity of the data (Moustakas, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; McLeod, 2015), to discover meaning and shed more light onto the phenomenon (McLeod, 2003, 2015; Etherington, 2004; Willig, 2008).

Depending on the focus of a project, both qualitative and quantitative are valued paradigms, and much is written of a mixed methods approach to enhance research and its validity (Kisely & Kendall, 2011; McLeod, 2015). Quantitative research has been historically more prevalent, with an emphasis on objective and generalised outcomes, and has dominated counselling and psychotherapy research (McLeod, 2015). However, Kisely and Kendall (2011) compared quantitative and qualitative approaches (in the psychiatric field), and suggested the qualitative method is becoming increasingly common. They proposed qualitative research can increase understanding of individual's "experiences and the process of therapy, facilitate engagement and partnership between researchers and participants, and promote action for change" (p.367). Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) added that data produced from qualitative research might reveal things that we had not imagined and this would be lost using a more number based quantitative approach. Polanyi (in Makut & Morehouse, 1994) concurred that the "human situation and human being are too complex to be captured by a static one-dimensional instrument" (p. 27).

One caution to the qualitative approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is the awareness of the researcher's subjectivity. This requires that the "biases, motivations, interests or perspectives of the inquirer" are identified and made explicit throughout the study (p. 290) and this is explored further in this investigation.

Heuristic methodology:

Heuristic inquiry is an emergent process. In his seminal exploration of Loneliness, Moustakas (1961) "sought to identify the processes and qualities that helped in the internal search of researchers in their attempts to explore, collect and interpret data holistically" (Hiles, 2002, in Kenny, 2012, p. 6). The six-stage process starts with the researcher seeking to discover more about *self* in the world (Moustakas, 1990); from this emerges the question. The process of discovery through personal encounter and self-dialogue, brings with it the opportunity to extend and deepen understanding and knowledge, a "posture of indwelling" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 39). This idea supports the qualitative researcher being the *instrument* in the study, building on their tacit knowledge and intuition by being open to the change and development in understanding of the topic (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Moustakas, 1990; Kenny, 2012). The emphasis is on valuing one's own experience, to access all the senses in exploration of the chosen topic. This requires the qualitative researcher to work as a 'bricoleur', gathering and piecing together the data to skilfully create an analysis that is representative of the participants' voices.

Moustakas (1990) argued that knowledge evolves from direct human experience and tacit knowing: the implicit knowledge of the self of the researcher. This process is autobiographic, "yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social – and perhaps universal – significance" (p. 15). He stated that "at the heart of heuristics lies an emphasis of self-disclosure as a way of facilitating disclosure from others"; "the eyes and voices" of others can inform and illuminate the researcher (p.17).

Reflexivity:

The need for the qualitative researcher to be continually reflexive is an essential part of the process. It addresses bias and brings an awareness of the researcher's potential prejudgments and assumptions becoming part of the research. Jootun et al. (2009) argued that reflexivity is one of the pillars of qualitative research, enhancing the quality and the constant reflection of the researcher to recognise,

> *"that they are part of the social world being studied. Reflecting on the process … can only add credibility to the research and should be part of any method of qualitative enquiry." (p. 3)*

I have addressed this by writing reflexive memos, keeping a separate reflexive journal to explore my process throughout the research, and in supervision (Jootun et al. 2009; Fleet, Burton, Reeves, & DasGupta, 2016). This process has opened awareness to ethical issues, the imbalance of power in the research/participant relationship and how my beliefs and values may influence the study. I have been drawn to participant stories, identified with them and tapped into my own story through this engagement. To this end, I have engaged in *bracketing,* with an awareness to understand my thoughts and

beliefs during the process, be more attentive to personal assumptions. Jooton et al (2009) suggested the reflexivity process is,

> *"… an invaluable tool to promote unbiased deep understanding of the phenomenon under study and how the issue of subjectivity can be turned into an opportunity. The key to this process is to make the relationship and the influence of the researcher and participants explicit." (p. 10)*

They suggest action points to ensure reflexivity seen in Table 2.

Table 2 - **Reflexivity Action Points**

- **Keeping a research diary is essential for exploring what may be impacting the researcher's interpretation of the data, bringing awareness to personal views of the data and your "relationship to the research topic and the participants".**
- Having a research supervisor who will be searching, questioning and thorough "with the courage to question your assumptions".
- **Gain greater awareness of the subject matter and data you are working with "record and transcribe the interviews, type them yourself", to understand more fully any personal processes that may be influencing this.**
- Be open in the process and be "prepared to reinterpret and re-gather data in areas that fall outside your initial assumptions". This process may reveal and bring to awareness material not previously imagined!
- **Be clear about choices of participants and questions and how this evolved - and be transparent about how you as researcher have potentially influenced the process. This will help to acknowledge the researcher impact on the researcher process:**
  "Qualitative findings are derived from the participants' perspective but interpreted by the researcher and the processes of this interpretation, the thinking of the researcher should be an explicit part of the research, which should be clearly articulated."

(Jootun et al, 2009, p.10)

This guide has been helpful in raising my awareness of the potential for bias. I am part of the study in heuristic enquiry, so balancing potential bias and subjectivity, without assuming a position of detachment, is important to acknowledge in this process (Moustakas, 1990).

Research Design:

The design lends itself to heuristic process. As referred to earlier, Moustakas' Stages of Heuristic Process (1990) encourage flexibility for the researcher to deeply engage with the phenomenon. Table 3 outlines the different phases within each stages of the process, and some personal reflections within this process.

Table 3 - Phases of Heuristic Inquiry

Phase	**Description of Process**
Initial engagement	This is the beginning of the internal processes of discovery, from an intense interest, a passion and internal desire for fundamental understanding of meaning of a subject or phenomenon. There is a yearning to discover the essence of the subject for some "fundamental truth" (Moustakas, 1990, p40) seeking clarity, understanding and integration (Kenny, 2012). During this, one will encounter the self, in a search for more meaning. *This process of initial engagement led to the formation of my question on aloneness; the personal experiences of the individual, in their role as the*

	counsellor, and ultimately how and if this manifests in the therapeutic relationship.
Immersion	The question decided, the researcher "lives, the question in waking, sleeping and even dream states" (Moustakas, 1990, p28). This means being open to experiencing the phenomenon in all aspects of life. *I opened myself to these possibilities, inviting the experience in, staying with it when it arose in different aspects of my life. This opened my awareness to my sense of the phenomenon further. I noted responses and reactions. I was more open to, and absorbed in, the process and to how this may present itself to me, (Moustakas, 1990)*
Incubation	Retreating from the absorption of the phenomenon of aloneness. Moustakas (1990) suggested this part of the heuristic process gives rise to the possibility of new understandings, through a pulling back from focus on the topic of investigation; tacit workings [uncovering] meanings and essences… The seed has been planted; the seed undergoes silent nourishment, support and care that produces a creative awareness of some dimension of a phenomenon…" (p29). *During incubation my alone experiences became heightened. This related to my encounters, and tuning into others' aloneness (friends, family and clients). I had an increased sense of how I was experiencing different aspects of my aloneness. At times I had to withdraw and pull away, before engaging again with the*

	investigation. Sometimes I felt I had a choice in this, at other times I reflected on this being organic.
Illumination	This involves reflectiveness and becoming open to a more intuitive experience; the opportunity arising to discover changes in our perceptions that may have been distorted. *This involved insight, awareness and more fully present with aloneness, challenging my perceptions, bringing me closer to all experiences of aloneness.*
Explication	Explication involves looking in detail at the experiences that have arisen in the process. This is wherever focus and indwelling have occurred and created space to explore "nuances". *This phase is where themes developed more focus, within the thematic analysis a process of revisiting and re-evaluating again and again the raw data; a process of appraisal and reappraisal to authenticate understanding the heart and soul of the experience.*
Creative synthesis	This final phase draws together the many elements of the experience and understandings that have emerged in the research and these are brought together to form a coherent whole (Kenny, 2012).

	This involved an expression of inward experience, a creative expression of the self-searching process I have been involved in over the past four years.

The research paradigm for this study is *interpretivist*, based on the underlying philosophical assumptions of understanding the world from our subjective experiences and the meanings we attach to these. It focuses on the complexity of human existence (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This approach complements the qualitative research and heuristic methodology. It fits the endeavour to discern meaning and experience of aloneness and to gather deeper understandings of the participants' perceptions whilst being part of the study as collector and analyst of the data (Creswell, 2003).

Finding participants and sampling:

As a novice researcher, I had questions about how to sample my participants: the number of *representatives*, what information I was hoping to elicit, whether this would bring illumination to my question. Choosing a sampling method is influenced by the question being answered. Tongco (2007) suggested that,

> *"Based on both the question and the community of study, the expert purposive sampler will intuitively know if purposive sampling is applicable, how to find informants, where to find informants, how many informants are needed, and how to correctly assess reliability and credibility of an informant" (p. 155).*

Alongside the challenges of being novice, questions of validity and non-bias in qualitative research and the choice of sampling and sample size are an important part of the process (Tongco, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2008). As my aim was not to generalise but gain insights, purposive sampling was chosen. It is widely used in qualitative studies and allows for the researcher to find people with the experience who are prepared to participate (Bernard 2002; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006, in Tongco, 2007).

Sample:

I advertised (see Appendix 1) for participants on the Counselling Directory and distributed approved posters via colleagues and peers. These had been agreed by the Ethics Committee (University of Chester). After a discussion with my research supervisor, I decided 4-6 participants would be a sufficient number for this small-scale study, taking into account the research design, heuristic process, time and limitations of the scale of the study. Inclusion criteria were applied for participants in the study (see Appendix 2 and 3). These included:

- participants had to have an interest in aloneness.
- been practicing as a counsellor for at least 3 years (or 300+ hours) and in supervised practice.
- and have access to counsellor support as necessary.

There were practical and ethical considerations in applying these criteria: counsellors had an interest in the subject and in exploring their subjective experience and in relation

to practice and they were experienced counsellors with a reflective practice, whilst not making assumptions based on this experience and interest that the material shared would not leave participants vulnerable (McLeod, 2015). To this end, I checked out that participants had access to therapy and/or other support.

Participants who responded were sent an information sheet (Appendix 4), and following their responses and fulfilling the research criteria, an interview date was set. I made participants aware that if at any point they wanted to withdraw, that this was possible up to the first draft of the dissertation (Maykutt & Morehouse, 1994; Etherington, 2004, Willig, 2008) I felt this was conveyed with sensitivity, openness and congruence, respecting them in the process and in relation to the research study (Mousakas, 1990). Although I had more than 4-6 replies, several respondents were unable to take part due to not meeting the criteria or timing issues. At the end of this process I had the requisite four participants who met the criteria and were willing to continue with the process. They were sent confirmation of this (see appendix 6) and consent was gained from each (see Appendix 7), and I am sincerely grateful for their time, patience and wholehearted engagement in this exploration.

Data collection:

Pilot interview:

One pilot interview was arranged with a peer initially. The process was similar to above with consent, recordings and debrief. Feedback and questions on the process with the participant provided a helpful reflection process for me (Maykutt & Morehouse, 1994; Etherington, 2004, Willig, 2008). I was aware from this interview that I had identified

some of my experiences with those shared. On reflection, I was surprised by some expectations I had about what would be discussed and it was helpful to keep this in my awareness in relation to bias (Jootun et al., 2009). I decided to keep a reflective journal, engaged in artwork, reading and writing poetry and exploring awareness of the processes I was experiencing.

Interviews with participants:

I chose a semi-structured interview approach, each lasting for approximately an hour. Moustakas (1990) suggested three different approaches to gather participant/co-researcher's data in the heuristic process:

- **An informal conversational interview** - which "relies on a spontaneous generation of questions" (p. 47) as the interview unfolds.
- **A general interview guide** – where the researcher explores information with all participants with more of a focus as with semi-structured questioning.
- **A standardized open-ended** – a structured interview with a list of question for participants.

Originally, I wanted a free-flowing interview compatible with Moustakas' *informal conversational* style, and one that felt most attuned to heuristic study. Based on my learning from the pilot, I became aware of time constraints and restrictions within a small scale study and selected a *general interview guide* with four areas of questions and supplementary questions available as prompts (Moustakas, 1990). These included

asking participants their understanding and experience of aloneness and how aloneness affected the therapeutic relationship (see Appendix 5). I changed my intention to send questions to the participants before the interview. My learning from the pilot allowed a more authentic and organic free flow of dialogue, and to trust myself. The preparation of questions had felt linked more to my insecurity of being a novice researcher than being helpful to the participants (Etherington, 2004; Tongco 2007; Willig, 2008).

Data analysis procedure:

Thematic analysis is suited to the heuristic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Braun and Clarke identified six phases used as a framework alongside a checklist and advantages of this analysis (Appendix 8, 9 & 10). I found this helpful when overwhelmed by the complexity and volume of data at the beginning of the research analysis process (2006). This is a time-consuming process yet allows for the immersion in the content of the interview and data (Moustakas, 1990).

The process of analysis:

The main themes from interviews with participants:

Transcriptions of the recordings were sent to participants for changes and accuracy. I listened to the recordings several times more and made notes. I followed a *complete* analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013), long-listing codes relevant to each participant's dialogue (Appendix 11). I repeated this process after some reflective space, revising and amending codes as appropriate (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). The process involved mainly computer work to this point, with some notes made on my process,

feelings and experiences (Moustakas, 1990). Then I adopted a more creative approach, printing off the codes on different coloured paper for each participant, cutting out each code and arranging in themes per participant (Appendix 11).

It felt important during this process of analysis to take time to review and reflect (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). I found the process overwhelming at times, the richness of the texts providing a vast number of potential codes and, consequently, themes. The responsibility weighed heavy to analyse the data and provide as representative an account in relation to my question, paying attention to validity and personal bias, alongside doing justice to the data shared by the participants (Willig, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2013). The final analysis involved a long list of themes per participant then reviewing these to see patterns in the data. Two *overarching themes* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) emerged in relation to the research question: *Personal experiences of aloneness*, and *Awareness of aloneness and the therapeutic space (the therapist's perspective).*

Table 4 shows the candidate themes which provided the basis for the final themes presented in the findings.

Table 4 - **Candidate Themes**

1. Space
2. Physically Being Alone
3. Alone, Loneliness or Solitude?
4. Not Understood by Others
5. Connecting, Disconnecting, Reconnecting
6. Choosing Aloneness
7. Personal Experience of Aloneness
8. Beneficial/Positive Experience of Aloneness
9. Adverse/Negative Experience of Aloneness
10. Balancing aloneness and together
11. Need for Aloneness
12. Aloneness in the Lifespan – childhood to adulthood
13. Personality Types
14. Aloneness and the Therapeutic Relationship
15. The Role of the Counsellor
16. Self-Understanding
17. Self-Care
18. Learning from Study

Validity:

"Without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility" (Morse et al, 2002). The underlying philosophy and nature of knowledge derived from the qualitative and quantitative paradigms is different, therefore the criteria for evaluating validity and reliability will differ (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Golafshani, 2003). The qualitative researcher is the "instrument in the research" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600), hence a part of the research process as stated, and much is dependent on their ability as a researcher.

There is agreement that some *measure* is necessary to test and demonstrate reliability and validity in research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; McLeod, 2015), though there is dispute on the process. Researchers develop their own terms and concepts for credibility, such as "quality, rigor and trustworthiness*"* (Golafshani, 2003, p. 602), and there is a debate on whether these concepts are relevant and applicable in the qualitative field (Golafshani, 2003; Morse et al., 2002) as they originate from quantitative paradigms.

Morse et al. (2002) argued that obtaining *rigour* throughout the research project in qualitative inquiry is important rather than "one section of post hoc reflection on the finished work" (p. 19). They explored using techniques of *verification* which take into account the "varying philosophical perspectives inherent in qualitative inquiry" (p.19) that meet the requirements to achieve reliability and validity. They argued that

> *"... a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis"* (p.17)

Golafshani (2003) suggested triangulation as a significant approach in more naturalistic research as it strengthens the data and facilitates validation using multiple sources of research, and adding information from more than one standpoint to give insight to the issues and reducing bias (Johnson, 2017).

Some of the disadvantages associated with qualitative research can be minimised by the researcher. I have increased validity through reflexivity and reflection, being aware of myself in the process. I have acknowledged that I am part of the study and my experiences of aloneness will have influenced the formulation of the question, the project design and choice of analysis for interpreting the data (Etherington, 2004). I did not attempt to remove myself from this investigation (Moustakas, 1990). Although the experiences and stories of co-researchers can illuminate "and bring into focus the internal frameworks of researchers" to provide a more complete view of an experience that can be said "to be heuristically valid because it comes from within" (Kenny, 2010, p. 8), the heuristic process primarily focuses on the researcher and their transformation (Hiles, 2001; Kenny, 2010.)

The research has been approached "layer by layer" (Johnson, 2017, p. 94), from initial engagement to analysis, starting with a broad approach to the question, revealing more detail and focus at each stage. Mousakas (1990) concurred that returning to the data

"again and again" (p. 33) to check representations facilitates "the process of achieving a valid depiction of the experience being investigated" (p. 33). Eventually though, such a process is a representation and interpretation of the researcher's "ultimate judgement" (p. 33).

Ethical considerations:

A primary objective has been consideration of maintaining standards, integrity and validity in the process (McLeod, 2015). Willig (2008) stated that there are basic rules for consideration, such as informed consent, no deception, right to withdraw, debriefing and confidentiality. This is to protect the participants from harm, protecting "their well-being and dignity at all times" (p. 26).

I gained approval from the University of Chester's Ethics Committee and consulted the University's research policies and the BACP Ethical Guidelines for Research in the Counselling Professions (2018), the Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (2015, 2018) and the Data Protection Act (1998, 2018) which changed over the duration of my research. I have been "ethical attuned" (Willig, 2008, p. 26) throughout the process, with an awareness that unpredictability may need consideration and responding to, much as it does in counselling practice. From a personal perspective, I have experienced periods of ill-health and unanticipated life-events that have challenged by ability to continue with this investigation, and with the support of my supervisor I have taken time away from the process. McLeod (2015) argued there are many issues that can arise during the process of research "no matter how much thought

and care have gone into the formulation of the ethical procedures that are being applied" (p.65).

This research had the potential to bring up painful experiences and tap into feelings unexpectedly, for both participants and for me. To this end, I considered how the research may impact co-researchers and what decisions could go some way to address this. The inclusion criteria (see Appendix 2 & 3) incorporated consideration of experience as a practitioner. Participants were asked if they had access to external support on the information sheet that was sent before interview (Appendix 4). I spoke with each participant before and after the interview, and though this is not a guarantee of course, it goes some way to address ethical and self-care processes as part of the study. This was also part of discussions with my research supervisor when deciding on the criteria and what would need to be shared with the participants before, during and after the interview process.

At the outset, participants were sent information about the study (Appendix 4). At interview, their written consent (Appendix 7) was requested, with time to explore the research and any questions before and after the interview. A verbatim transcription was offered to each participant for their approval, and I was clear about their right to withdrawn without reprisal up to the first draft stage (Moustakas, 1990; Makut & Morehouse, 1994; McLeod, 2015).

As part of the heuristic inquiry I have engaged in personal reflection and reflexive practice. This process has been an ongoing internal dialogue and part of my self-care process throughout has been helped by meditation and creative exploration (Bolton, 2001, in Etherington, 2004). This has been alongside the support of my supervisor for the research study, professional counselling supervision, peers, family and friends, with some fun at times too. It is a heavy subject to explore! During the heuristic process and creative synthesis, I have been contemplating which parts I feel able to self-disclose as part of the study. This has not been an easy task.

Summary:

I have examined the paradigm and methodology chosen for this research. I have explored my reasons for selecting a qualitative process and how Moustakas' heuristic stages have informed my approach. Thematic analysis has been investigated as the chosen approach for evaluating the data (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2013). Lastly, the importance of engaging in reflexivity has been focused on alongside validity, ethical considerations and the potential for researcher bias in this process of qualitative research.

There are days when solitude is heady wine that intoxicates you,
others when it is a bitter tonic, and still others when it is a
poison that makes you beat your head against the wall.

(Carr, 1939, p. 139).

Chapter IV: Research Findings: *explication*

Introduction:

The richness of the data shared by participants is immeasurable in its diversity, uniqueness and symbolising a shared humanness in our experiences of aloneness. It is my intention to let their words speak for them. It is part of the heuristic process for the co-researchers to "remain visible in the examination of the data and continue to be portrayed as whole persons" (Moustakas, 1990, p.39).

I have begun with individual depictions of the four participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1990). These are my interpretations from our dialogues of what was salient to the research question. The anonymity of participants is protected using pseudonyms, with some data altered to respect their confidentiality. The participants are referred to as following: CoR(i), Jo; CoR(ii), Sam; CoR(iii), Jamie; and CoR(iv), Alex. The numbers after the quotes refer to the transcription line number reference. Where I have used several dots in the verbatim quotes, this indicates a break in the dialogue.

Individual depictions:

CoR (i): Jo

Jo described aloneness as essential to her life. It provided space to connect and communicate, a concentrating space to be physically alone. It was also a creative space.

She described her experience as mostly nurturing and beneficial to her wellbeing, and part of self-care. Aloneness was about choice, and something changed if it was not predictable. If unexpected or too long, it often could become lonely. Aloneness was not possible always and it was difficult to ask for. Finding a balance between aloneness and social interaction was explored as a paradox at times. Jo conveyed the importance of personal boundaries and in the therapeutic space, of being alone with the client, and the contradiction of being alone *together*. *Aloneness together* allowed for a focus with the client, and personally "an inward adventure" of discovery of the client's world.

CoR (ii): SAM

Sam described her experience of aloneness as a primary need to thrive. It was something she chooses and was instinctive. Sam found aloneness necessary for developing awareness, to observe thoughts and consider feelings. It was a "cushion" providing balance and time for self. Sam felt others did not always understand her *need* for aloneness, nor her positive connection with it. Sam expressed a distinction between aloneness and loneliness. Aloneness was being physically alone and finding balance between times when she wanted aloneness and connections with others was a challenge. Sam believed her experience of aloneness helped her connection with clients and provided the self-awareness she needed to be available. Aloneness allowed for developing self-understanding and authenticity as a practitioner.

CoR (iii): Jamie

Jamie acknowledged aloneness was “not a great” experience always. It could provide the opportunity to reflect, time to recalibrate and a space to observe feelings. She experienced feeling alone as a counsellor often, even when she worked in a team. Aloneness brought up feelings of sadness and being unsupported. In the counselling world aloneness was related to a lack of connection with others for her. The impact of aloneness left her feeling under-resourced as a counsellor. Without the support of others, it was more challenging to build personal resilience.

CoR 4: Alex

Alex explained aloneness as essentially positive yet with a shadow side. He said it was a nourishing space to consider feelings and consolidate and a private space for potential growth; the shadow side could be challenging and painful. Aloneness meant physically being alone, and it involved choice and planned time. Aloneness, solitude and loneliness were different experiences; solitude was always a positive experience. Loneliness, on the other hand, was something Alex would not choose. Alex said aloneness was different within the therapeutic relationship than in personal experiences; it had a different purpose. He explained that experiences of aloneness in the counselling room helped him to *tune in* and connect with the client. For him, this created space for discovery and meaning. Self-care and time out from counselling was an essential for Alex to recharge and connect with self and others.

Themes from analysis of participants' data:

Two overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013) emerged in relation to the research question: *Personal experiences of aloneness* and *Awareness of aloneness and the therapeutic space (the therapist's perspective)* represented below. The seven final themes can be seen in Table 5 (below); not each category necessitated a sub-theme. The findings for each theme are presented with pertinent verbatim dialogue from participants to illustrate the theme.

OVERARCHING THEMES

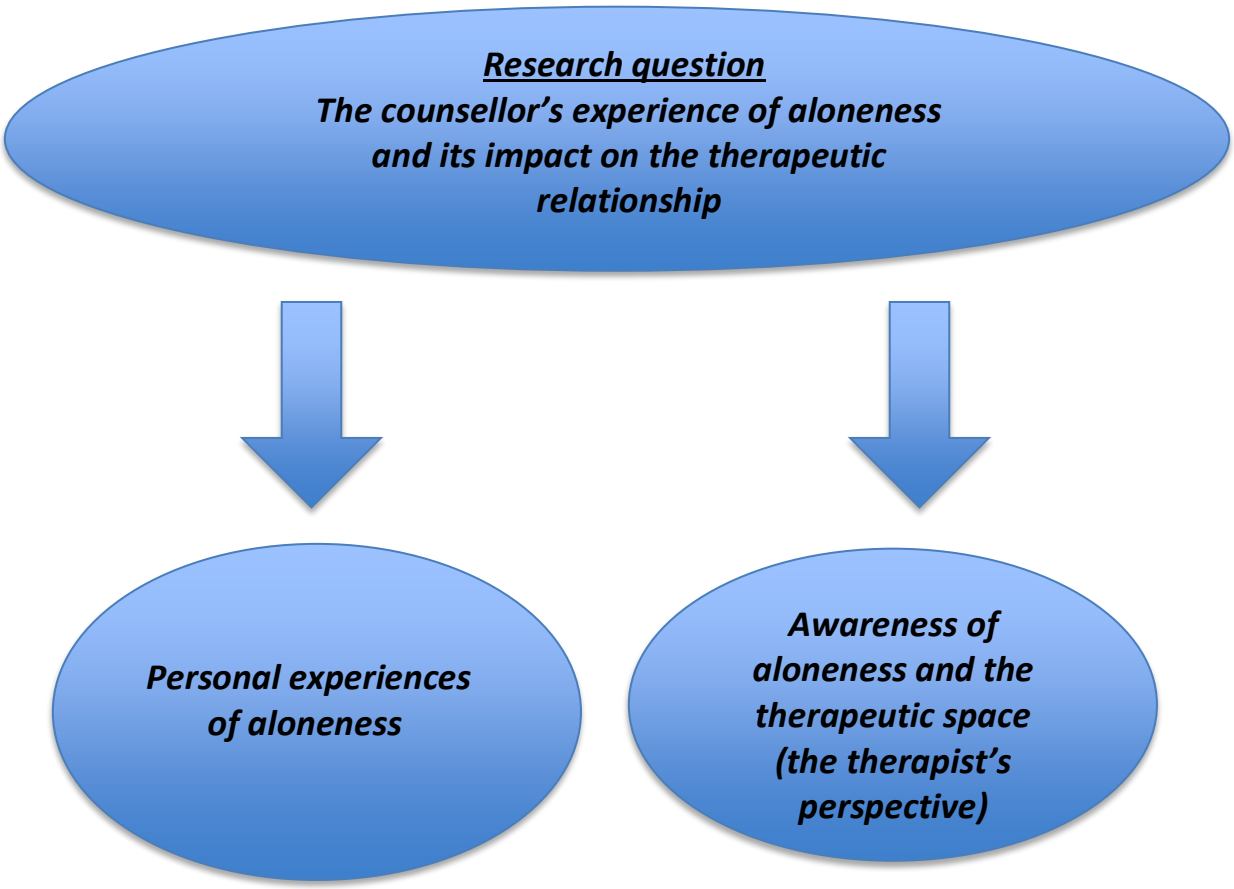


TABLE 5 - Final Themes:

1. Aloneness Provides Space

Sub-Themes: Need for Aloneness;

Internal and external space

2. How Aloneness Affects Attachments

Sub-Themes: Connection;

Disconnection

3. Aloneness as a Choice

Sub-Themes: Choosing to be Alone;

Alone, Lonely, Solitude – What's the difference

4. The Uniqueness of Aloneness Experience

Sub-Themes: Beneficial experiences

Adverse experiences

5. Aloneness is Not Always Understood By Others

6. How Aloneness Affects the Therapeutic Relationship

Sub-Themes: Role of the Counsellor

Letting the Client In

The Counsellor's Experiences Affects the Relationship

7. Aloneness and Self Care as a Therapist

Theme 1: Aloneness provides space:

Each participant shared how space was integral to their experience of aloneness. This manifested itself in different ways for each. However, there was a general sense of space being necessary.

Sub-theme 1: Need for aloneness

Aloneness emerged as a *need* for some participants. Alex related this to private thinking time, away from the crowd, choosing aloneness to find a space for himself:

> *I go with an issue, or I just need to get space because actually I just need to suspend what I'm thinking about…… and actually I just need to sit and be alone, and experience aloneness, and……. to maybe let things simmer… or settle (361-80).*
>
> *… at the heart of aloneness, the state of aloneness… and my choosing it at times is I need space (815-21).*

Jamie explained that aloneness provided her with the space to step back and take a break,

> *… needing more time to be alone to rest and recover… to have a bit more headspace (757-62).*

Sam needed aloneness to create space so things could become clearer, to reflect, observe, notice and analyse her world. Like Jamie, Sam said it provided the opportunity for her head to be less full and the potential for life not to speed to one hundred miles an hour. Aloneness was important for calmness too.

> *It's that cushion of the resource, of thinking space… not even thinking space… it's reflective space… and I use it as a resource and when I'm depleted (1482-85),*

> *I like, really like, time on my own. I also like to… connect with the others, but it just needs to be in balance.… so, if I've gone into this space of needing time to replenish my energy, or just need some time and space for myself for things to become a bit clearer (158-61).*

Jo said she felt her need for aloneness may be more prevalent than for others. In her experience, time and space without interruption was essential for her to feel,

> *… restful… physically… mentally. It's like having a deep breath of air or something… or oxygen… so it's just, 'huh' (sound)… (pause)… but what does it do for me (pause)… it's like… it's like… it's like… turning off noise or something (454-68).*

Sub-theme 2: Internal and External Space

Space in aloneness somehow helped to *bridge the gap* between the participants' outer and inner worlds. Sam felt that aloneness allowed space for what information was in-coming.

> *I interpret the aloneness… also as space… and that gives me the space to understand the world… the external world, internal world… I can't do it if I'm having a lot of… input… because input that's coming 'in' I want to understand… and for that I need the space. (60-80).*

Alex suggested that aloneness was related to finding physical, emotional psychological space.

> *I just want space… actually physical and psychological space… and emotional space…to be alone... To actually enter into a state of aloneness... It's just sitting, contemplation, or looking around trying to get inspiration… and actually, hold and process the feelings… and kind of allow myself to at least tell myself what I'm really thinking…that's the state, that openness (626-63).*

For Sam and Jo, not being able to access aloneness brought up negative feelings and conflicts. They wanted to be with others – friends, family, colleagues and clients – but they also needed space to be alone and to recharge, replenish and recalibrate. Sam said,

> *… if that [alone time] doesn't happen… then it feels like I'm going 100 miles an hour… by the midweek, I'm feeling it. That's negative for me. Then, I know… I would need to carve out some time for myself just, you know, sit with a cup of tea. Just be. Nobody to… converse with… because there's a conversation that's going on with me and I need to hear it (laughs)… (539-53).*

Theme 2: How Aloneness Affects Attachments

Connecting with self-experience and with others was emphasised throughout the interviews. These attachments brought up the significance of connections, reconnections and disconnections. There was the joy of connection with others and the frustrations of not being able to be alone when it was needed. There was a challenge highlighted in the data, to find a balance between these experiences

Experiences were shared regarding reconnection after spending time alone. *How* this might happen felt important. Participants (Jo and Sam) felt they were not always able to achieve what they wanted or needed. Within this theme, disconnection was explored in terms of reaching out for connections and not finding them. This brought up experiences of loneliness, isolation and disconnection for some participants.

Sub-theme 1: Connection

Jo said she felt her experiences of aloneness and connection could be paradoxical and conflicting; she wanted to be alone sometimes and wanted connection with others. She said she enjoyed both at different times. She felt weird and demanding with her needs for aloneness.

> *There's part of me that wants to **not** be social…. wants to **not** have anything in my diary…. sometimes to have…you know... nothing in my diary is perfection. You know it's just like…phew! … great… nothing… (pause)… but I feel like that's a bit weird, so I do have some (laughing) negative feelings about it… it's not that I don't like people… but… **some** of the time." (443-50)*

Jo stressed that social contact was important in her life, but sometimes found the balance challenging to achieve. She acknowledged that she enjoyed intensity and intimacy in relationships, yet it was significant for this to be *boundaried* within these relationships. She described it as an 'ON/OFF' experience. This ON/OFF brought predictability to her connections, and this was how she liked it, personally and professionally. Similarly, Sam liked the balance of alone time and connection with others.

> *Let's say I'm coming out of that space (short pause) and I would like to connect with a person or a thing, you know, just with the external world. And if that is not happening… the way I want… the way I expect… so I'm just coming out; it's almost like coming out of hibernation (L165-68).*

She said she felt the aloneness provided that time to connect with herself. She knew herself in this space, then she was ready to be with others.

> *I'm **being** with myself. I'm hanging around with me. And that's a very positive space for me (293-8).*

The connection to self through aloneness for Alex meant reconnecting with,

> *… a fundamental belief that I hold, that ultimately growth is always a possibility and aloneness is one way that enables me to reconnect with those… beliefs that I hold dearly… and are very important. (788-97).*

Sub-theme: Disconnection

Like Jo, Sam felt there were times when she wanted aloneness, and this was not in balance with others being available. When she was ready to connect and others were not, she felt disconnected. In her relationship with clients the disconnect can leave her feeling lonely and not able to connect with the client,

> *… if my client is presenting something and I am not very conversant with that area. Just feels a little bit alone… a tiny bit lonely, not alone… yeah… then what happens is something about… there's a disconnect. So, that would be the loneliness and so I would then recognise, 'hum that's coming up. Let's see a useful place to get some more clarity so we can both be on the same page'. So, I think when that is not there, until then I could feel that... lonely (1160-7)*

Jamie said she felt isolated and unsupported especially when she was feeling under-resourced and not able to form connections within the teams she worked. This affected her confidence in herself.

> *I don't know the people that I'm working with… as a team I like to know what people have expertise and stuff in. You know, you're all part of a jigsaw puzzle. And when you only build up and become whole, that's what becomes the driving vehicle for the service, and that is somewhat disconnected at times (1267-71).*

She believed there was a need to affiliate so there was someone to turn to for support. Being connected to herself, as well as her personal resilience, enabled her to be present.

> *I think if I was alone and I was connected with myself, and I had that stability, I wouldn't have any issues about working with my client, but then at other times when you're had a bit of a shake in your foundation or things are going on for you, it puts you in a different stead, in terms of your ability (953-74).*

Theme 3: Aloneness As A Choice

Aloneness as a choice brought up planned time, predictability and having a reason to choose being alone. This was different for all participants. Jo, Sam and Alex saw choosing aloneness as positive and as a space for contemplation. However, if not chosen aloneness brought up different experiences that were less associated with replenishment, and more about separateness from selves and others.

Sub-theme 1: Choosing to be alone

Choice brought up similar feelings to *need* with aloneness. Choice emerged as a fundamental part of the personal experience for Jo, Sam and Alex. Sam suggested that choice,

> *…. helps… my view is it helps my growth (378).*

Sam wished others could share these feelings of enjoyment that she had when being alone physically and emotionally. Jo said she experienced her choice for aloneness as planned time, with a sense of wanting some control over it.

> *I like it to be my way of being alone… so it would be on the whole day Time alone, predictable alone as well…… if it's more random, it's not as good… (laughs)… yeah and alone at night isn't quite the [same]… yeah …that's not… that's… I wouldn't particularly like that… no… that's more lonely (quieter voice) (178-201).*

Aloneness and choice were a crucial part of Alex's experience; more positive and nourishing. Similar to his experience of solitude, he chose to be alone, and in the main this is a positive experience for him.

> *My experience of aloneness when I've chosen it and actually planned it… it's more, nine out of ten times, in nature (59-60).*

> *I have a reason for choosing aloneness… I go with an issue, or I just need to get space because actually I just need to suspend what I'm thinking about… as a way of also processing it without being absolutely focussed on it, trying to work out an answer… and actually I just need to sit and be alone, and experience aloneness, and… to maybe let things simmer or settle (361-84.)*

Alex said he felt loneliness was not a choice, and in aloneness there was choice sometimes. However, it is not always chosen, and solitude is chosen. These were distinct for Alex. He described solitude as beautiful, whereas aloneness was not always so,

> *It's a meaningful experience for me, by and large… even when I'm sitting with pain, it's something I'm choosing cos I need to take a little time here… just to be alone (451-56).*

<u>*Sub-theme 2: Alone, Lonely, Solitude*</u>

The participants shared significant and different understandings of aloneness, loneliness and solitude. Jamie's interpretation was that sometimes there was a choice and

aloneness could be ok, but aloneness could become different, not something that she would *choose* that could slip into something more akin to being lonely.

> *I wouldn't relate it… feeling alone… being great most of the time… I think it can come in its peaks and troughs… sometimes the aloneness is good, cos you don't really want to interact with other people at that time and it gives you an opportunity to reflect … and you know, properly process your own stuff as well … but other times it can just feel… you can just be very aware of it and notice that, you know, there is a bit of a gap or a void there (347-60).*

Similarly, Alex debated his experience of the shadow-side of aloneness. There being a distinction between the feelings of loneliness and aloneness,

> *I've also experienced aloneness at the death of loved ones. And that isn't the same as loneliness either… it's aloneness because there is someone missing… yeah… so, I don't know if for me if it really maybe crosses more into a feeling of absence or loneliness or… being lonely, but aloneness standing, you know, at the graveside of loved ones… that's to me is a shadow side of aloneness (67-90).*

Jo's choice involved boundaries, metaphorically to be ON or OFF like a switch. This was less clear cut in her personal life than with clients. Aloneness was also about being private time,

> *There's something about… that aloneness being private as well, sort of creative aloneness or something… just that word private… privacy is essential for being alone, for aloneness I think, somehow (1607-30).*

<u>Theme 4: Uniqueness In Experiences Of Aloneness</u>

The breadth and depth of what each participant shared in our conversations cannot be captured fully. Words and phrases such as: courage, enabling authenticity, being

separate, feeling secure, difficult to articulate, entering into your humanity, bodily sensations, not being understood, feeling different, are some of the issues discussed during our dialogues. This theme communicated the importance of giving space for the expression of how different it is for each individual, and what may be taken from this into our relationships.

Sub-theme 1: Beneficial Experiences

Sam described her experience of aloneness as a place to do internal work, gaining understanding as she has grown through life experiences. It is instinctive and a place of joy and positivity for her. Comparably, Jo's aloneness was usually a positive experience that she looked forward to,

> *I experience that as very calm…that I can actually be in my own headspace then* (77-85).

It was a space of potential creativity, this being something she had remembered doing in childhood, and still engaged in. Alex felt aloneness was a mainly positive space to sit and contemplate, for inspiration and to hold and process feelings,

> *… and kind of allow myself to at least tell myself what I'm really thinking… that's the state, that openness (659-63),*

> *… it's ultimately more positive… it's tapping into… trying to tap into those human resources we have… resilience... courage (697-710).*

Processing feelings was part of aloneness for Jamie also, and this could bring up a mix of feelings.

> *It's nice though when you've got that time to just reflect and rest and recover… but not so nice, I suppose, when you're not feeling so great (445-7).*

Sub-theme 2: Adverse Experiences

Alex talked about aloneness bringing up mixed experiences. He defined the essential components of aloneness and was curious about what he found when he explored it.

> *Aloneness is choice to focus, space, slowing down is an important phrase for me… creating space… to tune in… open up a wider pathway. It's about meaning, a discovery… understanding. It is beautiful, but it's a … it is a challenging pathway… it can be. What do you find there? Yeah! It could be truly joyous, but it can also be truly horrific! (1469-1488).*

Jamie connected aloneness with the negative aspects she associated with feeling unsupported. This was most challenging when she felt low and did not have personal resources to draw on. Jo felt that when aloneness edged towards loneliness, she could feel physical changes in her body. Her aloneness could feel weird and different from others. Sometimes she wanted to shut people out.

> *I can feel my face going a bit down when I say that… my shoulders going a bit down… like poor me kind of… 'oh, it's just me!' Whereas normally it's, 'PHEW', it's just me!' Now I can actually… concentrate and think about things…. concentrate on things… (143-53).*

Theme 5: Not Understood By Others

Jo and Sam expressed their aloneness was not always understood by others. Jo found there was

> *… something big and creative to me about aloneness… you know, but I think the world doesn't really get it (771-5)*

She found aloneness creative and liked the experience, however she felt confused as she perceived it was something others could view as negative. She said she felt judged for wanting to spend time by herself especially when she had felt labelled in her experience

> *… unless you've got a strong locus of control, you're gonna think, yeah that's selfish, I am selfish… and I did take that away from it… but also… I just don't think it was recognised… that it might be a need. So, I didn't understand that (362-8).*

Sam experienced an internal positivity when alone in childhood. She perceived it was something others were not doing and said she felt pressured that it was something she was not 'supposed to be doing'. In adulthood, she acknowledged she had acceptance and self-understanding. Others did not always understand however

> *… if both parties are open to it, then there is more of that bridge, when they can actually come into my world and I can go… back into their world as well. So, that happens but it's not always there as part of what I do because I don't feel I… something as naturally as that for me which is growth inducing for me … which is positive for me, which doesn't hurt anyone else, that I need to get confirmation on (laughs) (1124-33).*

Theme 6: How Aloneness Impacts The Therapeutic Relationship

At the heart of my study is the impact of the counsellor's experience of aloneness on the relationship with clients. All the participants shared how their experiences of their

personal aloneness affected the therapeutic connection to different degrees. As therapists we spend time alone in self-reflection, alone with clients and supervisors, and inherent in the role is confidentially and privacy. Participants in their role as counsellor, and its relationship with experiences of aloneness brought up distinct and significant responses.

Sub-theme 1: Role of the Counsellor

Sam said she felt her aloneness experiences drew her to psychotherapy. During her counselling training other students spoke of the role as isolating. This was not her experience, instead she said aloneness helped her as a counsellor. Conversely, Jamie experienced isolation and loneliness in the role of counsellor. It encompassed much responsibility and often little support. She believed her experiences had led to her reaching out to connect with others in the profession.

> *I've been very… mindful of that and encouraged people to be open… and to express their views… and know that they could contact me if they ever needed to… and to know that I was the 'buddy', say if we had a buddying system, for them to check in and out, so they could always contact me (276-94).*

> *… it's very personal. It's definitely very personal, and you know, we all experience things in different kinds of ways, but in essence… I think we are very much alone in the work that we do. There's no one there who sits next to us or who we can access whenever we want. You know, that presence, I think it's more about the presence (908-15).*

Sub theme 2: Letting the client in

Jamie said she felt that both parties experience aloneness when they first meet, this is physical, and potentially emotional. Creating the therapeutic conditions for the client in the room came from the counsellor's effort, providing the client with the space to speak.

> *There's nowhere to hide [for either party]. There's that… (short pause) you probably will be feeling similar things in different ways potentially as well… and... you know, the counsellor may be more equipped than the client to deal with that, but you're having to facilitate that relationship and that rapport… so the effort comes from you to build that and provide the environment, the space (1021-35).*

She suggested that when she is providing the space for the client, building this through rapport and connection something changes for her,

> *… that aloneness starts to fade, I think for both parties because its… you're no longer alone. You've built a rapport and a relationship. (1036-38).*

Alex said aloneness allowed him to zoom in on the client, heightening his senses so he could focus on their verbal and non-verbal communication, being "attentive to everything" (981). He suggested that,

> *Aloneness is an internal state wherever I am, but this is not me working on stuff for myself… it's not even me working out stuff for the client… they're able to do that. I'm trying to create the conditions to help them… to help facilitate that process… their process of discovery… so, internal and connection are the two key words for me (1114-25).*

He went to express,

> *…. it's creating the aloneness inside… that state… I need to really zoom in on this client now…I need to clear everything out of my system and telling myself deliberately in that alone state, within myself (1142-49).*

Sam considered the effect of empathising with the client's issues and need for that space in her work. She had been told she was 'calm' and related this to her experience of being able to

> *… think about the next intervention that might be useful. So, for that I need space… yeah… in my mind. So, the aloneness, I guess, what they [clients] call the calmness might be bringing the aloneness (1446-57).*

During the interview Sam became aware of her experience of aloneness, how she experienced it as very positive and fundamental to her, yet how this could be impacting clients in a way she hadn't considered.

> *I'm wondering when my clients are speaking about aloneness or loneliness whether I am able to… really meet them… and understand them, because they do sometimes speak about alone, "I felt so alone". What they are meaning really is "I felt lonely", and I'm wondering whether I am, you know, wondering if I am leaving out some… because it's such a positive thing for me… so that may have an impact on the work I'm doing (1212-47).*

Sub-theme 3: The counsellor's experience affects the relationship:

Sam spoke about aloneness, the connection that gave her with herself, and consequently how this impacted her work,

> *… as a therapist… when I feel connected to myself, I feel I can connect with the… the other human being in front of me... you know, it's more aligned with them (598-610).*

Aloneness helped her with clients, in the silence and the connection,

> *Aloneness is… I think is present in the room… It's almost like, you know, my limbs are present with me. It's pretty much like that. In that sense, it's there (1209-11).*

Jo found being with clients very satisfying.

> *Two people alone, no one else. That to me is very important (1009-10)*.

Her experience involved a need for boundaries, for a safe and protected relationship with the client in the counselling room. This space finite, intimate and with space for connection and intensity.

> *I think that, because the therapeutic relationship is so very boundaried and controlled, it feels safe for me to feel very, very connected to them… I find unpredictability… in people wanting to connect with me in an unpredictable way, I don't like that… that's uncomfortable for me. So… yeah, it's definitely is part of the deal… for me with clients (853-73).*

Jo related the therapeutic relationship to freedom, an escape and the connection she experienced as a child with aloneness, and that this was not always easy to explain to others. It being like an

> *… inward adventure with somebody really… and that's the kind of thing I used to write as a kid - adventure stories and things, but (pause)… people don't get, they don't understand that (1415-20).*

Jo said she felt in aloneness she is able to tune in, personally to herself and in the therapeutic space to the client,

> *There's limitless space… inside your imagination… and that's what you're using with a client really (1424-28)*

Also, the relationship was held within something bigger, that also provided a safety and nurture for both in the relationship;

> *What's in my mind now is an embryo inside the mother (laughs)… you know cos the baby's kinda alone... but not… but that's not the same really is it… maybe?... nurtured… and held… and supported, yeah (1572-99).*

Alex also experienced *a tuning into* the client, with his experience of aloneness creating space;

> *It's creating that space on the inside to **open** myself up more **fully** to the client and his or her material…it's a pathway, a wider pathway metaphorically, to the client's world (1363-74),*

and to

> *…listen, to yourself to the other… listen with bigger ears… look with wider eyes… open the senses (1397-8).*

> *It's all about meaning for me… or process of therapy and aloneness as I, when I reflected on my experience outside the larger experience of aloneness…it's about discovery, it's about meaning… which the therapeutic relationship is about too… the aloneness for me with a client in the therapeutic process is about deeper connection… deeper understanding, and a way of creating space in here in me… to… to allow more of what the client is saying (1035-1100).*

Alex said aloneness in the therapeutic relationship is also about 'a not knowing', and this allowed him to create space in the relationship with the client,

> *…part of my own experience is sometimes sitting with not knowing… and we talk a little bit about that which we find is good to know… aloneness arises around a genuine not knowing… a not knowing and just holding that helps me to hold it… helps me not to rush in… and to think I have to rescue… or within myself, that I'm failing… we're all different… unique, so how do we ever fully know anybody really…so, it's just… it kinda brings… it brings a nice reality check… and then I can go back to… right now stay with the client (1274-1314)*

For Jamie, her experiences of aloneness enabled her to build resilience to be in relationship with the client,

> *… to be strong because of my experience of being alone… and having to deal with various things… and having to persevere, and still be emotionally available for clients when I'm working with them… and it's probably something I've learned to do, as a result of experiencing the aloneness (832-56).*
>
> *When you've had that little bit more reflective space you feel a bit more ready to work with your client and engage with them. You've done that preparation (832-65).*

<u>Theme 7: Aloneness And Self Care As A Therapist</u>

All participants touched on the importance of looking after themselves as part of being a therapist. How this related to their experiences of aloneness differed. Jo saw supervision as a relationship that could support her if there was something troubling about a client relationship, and she was left feeling alone with an issue. For Jamie, building resilience is part of her journey. She felt resilience and aloneness were very

much connected. She reached out to supervisors, and supported herself by developing a DIY approach to self-supervision,

> *I know when I'm having a difficult day. I'll recalibrate my day to give myself more space to be prepared and to deal with what's coming up… I will reach out if needed (1048-55.)*

She felt affiliation was important, self-reflection time after sessions to recalibrate and understand herself.

> *I suppose the more supported you are, the more resilient you feel… the less supported you are, you feel less resilience… probably somewhat vulnerable at times… and I think I've built my own resilience to be strong because of my experience of being alone… So, I think they are very much connected (826-42).*

Alex used aloneness, among other methods, for self-care and private space for private thinking. He said it is a state he chose for contemplation, or maybe a good feeling, or confusion,

> *… trying to tap into those human resources we have… resilience... courage… aloneness is part of what I try to choose and do… to help me reconnect with that innate capacity, to try to resolve things… work things through (701-25).*

Sam saw aloneness providing her with the resources to self-heal and thrive, alongside connecting with others.

> *When the work comes to an end… yeah… I need time, I need to do something different from that work… so that I can come back to it (1486-99).*

Alex acknowledged that there were ways he could discharge his energy when needed at the end of the therapeutic encounter,

> *…maybe just even speaking to a colleague, obviously not discussing the client's issues or anything like that that would… impact on confidentiality…… there's the companionship. That's when I don't need aloneness. That's when I need just someone to say something to… or a physical work to discharge a bit of energy and shift the focus… and that's important… or even a bit of food… to… look after myself in that process too (1585-1623).*

Each participant spoke of increased awareness of aloneness personally and professionally. Sam said her awareness of her experiences had raised issues for further reflection as she wanted to be more open to hear client's experiences of aloneness. Alex made a connection between his experiences of aloneness being more frequent in the therapeutic relationship than he first thought, impacting experiences of relational depth.

> *… it's creating that space on the inside to **open** myself up more **fully** to the client and his or her material… unlike when I being **outside** on my own, in my own state of aloneness, for my own reasons… it's a pathway, a wider pathway metaphorically, to the client's world (1363-74).*

Jamie suggested there was a potential cost to her own well-being, and a downside of not looking after one's self. However, she recognised this was not always easy with internal and external pressures and expectations.

> *You know, you just kind of get on… and put yourself together and carry on… sometimes you can end up burning out yourself… because there is that expectation that you've got to be there for your client and keep it together and offer them the support, cos it's about them (909-31).*

Jo recognised her increased awareness of experiences - needing and wanting a creative and restful space *to be* – was a conflicted feeling perhaps requiring further exploration,

> *Well, talking about it now, it seems sad that I would have those feelings, when it's something quite precious to me. Urm… but I still think of it as something a bit odd! (744-5).*

Summary:

The dialogues with the co-researchers highlighted the breadth and depth of their personal experiences of aloneness. Their lived experiences have illustrated both commonalties and diversity in the phenomena. The encounters with aloneness in the therapeutic relationship is both complex and complicated. Their interviews illustrated the contextual nature of their experiences, as well as the deeply personal influences on how this is understood.

We're born alone, we live alone, we die alone.
Only through our love and friendship can we create the illusion
for the moment that we're not alone.

*(*Jaglom, H., Simonson, M. H., Wolinsky, J., & Jaglom. *Someone to Love*, *1987)*

Part V: Discussion of Finding: *further illumination and explanation*

Seven themes have emerged from the analysis of the data. Based on these, and related sub-themes, I have considered these in relation to the question, literature review and my experiences and processes as a heuristic researcher (Moustakas, 1990).

ALONENESS PROVIDES SPACE

Space was significant in the dialogues. Actively searching for aloneness to fulfil the need for space was true for three of the participants. The perceived need was unique to each and contextual (Moustakas, 1990; Rokach, 2000; Long & Averill, 2003; Spillier, 2007; Knafo, 2012). Participants related their experience of aloneness to finding the physical space or having space internally to process their feelings and experiences. The *need* some participants felt was akin to what Knafo (2012) referred to as a *hunger* for aloneness. In general, it was time sought as reflective space and for clarity and calmness (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982; Storr, 1997; Knafo, 2012). Research aligned with participants perceptions of these experience, with aloneness having potential to be a healthy and creative exploration (Storr, 1989; Maitland, 2014), though for others, a more tentative and potentially negative experience (Larson, 1997; Knafo 2012).

My personal need for space in aloneness paralleled with the participants, especially feelings that emerged from not being able to access alone time when I needed to. This could lead to feeling trapped and result in me withdrawing into more misanthropic feelings (Larson, 1997; Knafo, 2012).

The phenomenon of space also linked to the internal and external worlds of the participants. Aloneness appeared to *bridge the gap* to understanding inner and outer experiences (Jo, Sam and Alex). In order to have the capacity to be with others, two participants (Jo and Sam) suggested they needed internal space to process, only then were they able to connect with others. Moustakas intimated being alone was a space for self-learning, listening to "the voice within rather than from without" (1972, p. 19). If this space is unobtainable, there was a potential for fearful experiences, or *loneliness anxiety* to take hold (Moustakas, 1972; Rokach, 2004, Spillers, 2007).

How space might be related to understanding our capacity to be alone was perhaps less clear. This concurred with Thomas (2017) who proposed further development into our understanding of what was required to be alone. A potential challenging task requiring further research.

HOW ALONENESS AFFECTS CONNECTIONS AND ATTACHMENTS

Rokach (2012) suggested as humans we long for connection and intimacy (Winnicott, 1958; Fromm-Reichmann, 1959; Qualter, Vanhalst, Harris, Lodder, Bangee, Van Roekel, Verhagen, & Maes, 2015), and all participants expressed this being important.

Connection with self, others and clients was significant to aloneness experiences, yet brought up conflicts for the participants. Some expressed feeling misunderstood, and it caused internal confusion and mixed feelings being perceived as asocial.

The view that early attachments impacted on later relationships (Winnicott 1958; Long & Averill, 2003; Larson, 1990; Burger, 1995; Maes et al., 2015) was not explored explicitly by participants, however some experiences of aloneness from childhood (Jo and Sam) were significant moments they related as insight. This is related also to the influences of others and our culture; in family environments on a small scale, and society on a larger one (Storr, 1989; Knafo, 2012). I have reflected on personal childhood feelings of isolation and difference, from one of not fitting in, confusion and fear in aloneness, to more comfort in aloneness later life (Long & Averill, 2003; Maes et al., 2015). I have felt misunderstood often, and as I continue to process feelings I am aware of the innate complexity. The conflict I experience is in my awareness and it is not easily understood always. So, expecting others to 'get it' seems unreasonable, nevertheless desired. This, in turn, can bring feelings associated with more adverse aspects of aloneness, edging towards guilt, withdrawn, isolation and loneliness. This concurred with some participants' experiences also.

Yalom (1980) suggested it was not possible to bridge the gap between aloneness and connection, no matter how hard we strived for connection. This does not lessen our endeavour to find a balance to meet our individual needs, illustrated in this study by participants and my experience. Participants expressed wanting to find that equilibrium

between aloneness and connection (Knafo, 2012) with others socially and also within their internal experiences.

Knafo's (2012) ideas on *existential aloneness* and *emotional loneliness* can be related to the experiences shared by the participants. One participant (Sam) suggested when she was disconnected in her relationships (with clients), this had the propensity to become a lonely experience. Another (Jamie), similarly felt isolated and lonely when she was disconnected from others. According to Spillers (2007), the feeling of disconnection and a longing for relationship outside of our experience, or *emotional loneliness*, is a place where fear and anxiety can dwell. Spillers contended that our *relational framework* gave us a sense of being connected. This correlated to one participant's experience (Jamie) of wanting to affiliate with colleagues. When she felt unsupported and disconnected from her team, and not able to build a relationship, the negative association of aloneness was predominant. Long & Averill (2003) suggested that this fostered the potential to become something more damaging to an individual's wellbeing. The participant was unambiguous about her experience of this, and I too, can relate to a lack of connection and support impacting my health and wellbeing, and tipping towards detrimental feelings of isolation in the workplace.

ALONENESS AS A CHOICE

Exploring aloneness as a choice was ubiquitous in the findings, as well as present in the literature reviewed. This was alongside the proposition that there was *not* always a choice (Knafo, 2012; Andersson et al, 2014; Williams, 2017). Research (Winnicott, 1958;

Burger, 1990; Storr, 1997; Nguyen et al., 2019) and this study has shown our ability to be alone is influenced by many factors. This has implications on our capacity to make choices and our beliefs about our experiences of aloneness.

Choice felt fundamental to the participants. For some it was a planned time alone, with predictability being a central part of the experience. For others, there was a reason to choose aloneness, perhaps to do, sit, contemplate, or work something through. Participants (Jo, Sam and Alex) who shared their experiences of enjoyment in planning alone time for reflection, calm space and for creative pursuits, appeared to associate with Knafo's (2102) proposition. They displayed a sense of self-assurance in choosing alone time for the purposes of positive and restful experience; though also acknowledged it was not always positive. The feeling of intense calm and joy resonates with my experience of alone being chosen and creative.

Aloneness has a connection with private time and privacy (Burger, 1995), being chosen as personal space or time with family. Participants (Jo and Alex) referred to private time for thinking and being, "I just need to sit" (Alex, L496). Jo suggested privacy was essential for aloneness otherwise it would be spoiled.

Knafo (2012) proposed our relationship with aloneness was complex, unique and in constant flux. She argued there was a potential for both growthful and destructive experiences. Reflecting on my experiences during this study (Moustaskas, 1990), I have been curious about planning time to be alone (with self, other, or client etc.), and

whether this is pertinent always to manage what emerges at different times in our lives. Maybe something else is needed too. My awareness has been heightened to understand further that internal processes and external experiences sometimes clash, and I am not able to match my need for aloneness and time with others practically. So, what's the impact of this? With clients this time is predictable and boundaried, as one participant suggested; with self and others, not so easy.

Each participant had their distinctive understanding of the terms alone, solitude and lonely (Moustakas, 1978, 1990; Long and Averill, 2003; Rokach, 2004; Knafo, 2012). One participant (Alex) felt strongly that solitude was always positive and distinct from other of his experiences (Storr, 1997; Williams, 2017). Aloneness had a different meaning, perhaps less definable, and could lean towards loneliness with its *shadow side*; this could bring negative feelings also (all participants). Some participants viewed the terms solitude and aloneness as the same, or a similar experience (Jo, Sam). This is compatible with my experience. Aloneness brought uncertainty and negative feelings for Jamie, and when it was not chosen it felt enforced, not voluntarily entered into and not good for her well-being (Knafo, 2012).

The complexity of defining aloneness, solitude and loneliness, acknowledging subjective interpretations, has been much discussed in this study, and although a broader conversation has opened up within society and the media in the two years since this research, finding 'answers' appears no clearer. This study has led me to understand aloneness experiences more deeply, from my own and the shared personal perspectives

of others (Williams, 2017). Yet, I am no closer to clarifying a more universal meaning and believe this requires further study.

UNIQUENESS IN EXPERIENCES OF ALONENESS

I was comforted somewhat by the shared nature of experience; feeling 'different', not fitting in, and a detachment from others resonated with my experience of aloneness at times, and some of my experiences were assuaged following the meetings with each participant; an internal feeling of calmness and more self-acceptance, which surprised me. The depth and nuance in personal understanding is intriguing. What was experienced as beneficial 'headspace' for participants encompassed joy, growth, beauty, courage, authenticity, resilience, and separateness. My sense was each participant experienced many of these during alone time, whether chosen or not, and to each they were distinctive as experiences. (Storr, 1997; Maitland, 2014).

Similarly, the adverse experience of aloneness encompassed terms such as, weird, negative, painful, separate, sadness, and void. Each participant's experience being contextual to what was happening in their life. Some felt aloneness was chosen to be with more painful experience, to work something out and being curious to what may be discovered (Alex); choosing what could be perceived as an adverse side of aloneness. However, this side of aloneness could move further towards a more negative experience associated with loneliness and as one participant said, "who would choose that?". These experiences support Rokach's (2004) assertion that there is more to be understood of our capacity to be alone and what we need to navigate our way through these feelings.

NOT UNDERSTOOD BY OTHERS

When aloneness has felt instinctive for us, yet different from how we perceive others behave, there can be a sense of discordance in our self-understanding (Rogers, 2002). This was relatable to the experiences of some of the participants who felt confused by experiences of enjoyment and contentment in childhood, as it felt different to the judgements observed from others (Maitland, 2014). One participant related her guilt of wanting alone time to an awareness that others had not understood her need, nor her experiences of aloneness. This was true for another participant, who experienced 'internal positivity' in childhood, yet felt it was something she 'should not be doing'. The participants had clarity on their motivation for aloneness as a positive experience (Ryan & Deci, 2017), yet the judgement had impacted that experience.

One explanation some of the participants explored was categorising themselves as introverted, suggesting this was why they liked to spend time alone. Nguyen et al. (2019) explored the connection between personality type and our preference for aloneness, proposing that being motivated by a desire to want to be alone was judged as a healthy and normal behaviour; *constructive solitude* (Larson, 1997). These participants suggested they understood their motivation for aloneness yet others, judging perhaps from their own experiences, had not understood. Although these participants felt 'personality types' helped to understand *self* more in relation to others by 'bridging the gap' between the inner and outer worlds of self and other, Nguyen et al. (2019) suggested the correlation was not supported and more likely to be influenced by making choices based on one's own experience and values (Long and Averill, 2003).

HOW ALONENESS IMPACTS THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

As referenced earlier, there is over forty years of research into the unique nature and significance of therapeutic relationship (Paul & Haugh, 2008; Norcross, 2010; Norcross & Lambert, 2011; Baldwin, 2013). The impact of aloneness in this relationship is little researched. Hence, what has been shared by participants adds valuable material to this conversation (McLeod, 2015).

Long and Averill (2003) suggested an ability to draw on personal resources within our experience of aloneness, and maintain feelings of relatedness to others, can promote positive experiences for potential benefit. One participant felt that insight into her subjective experience of aloneness led her to understand why she had become a therapist. I related to the shared experiences of aloneness providing space and insight into self, that allowed for connection with others as a counsellor; as one participant suggested, there is the possibility of an "inward adventure" which fostered space and connection to be with the client in their world.

Poignant examples of their experiences of aloneness, as counsellors in the room with their client, were shared by participants. Sam suggested aloneness was present in the room with her, like her "limbs" were in the room. Other participants spoke of there being a physical aloneness, a necessary privacy, separateness and a confidential element to aloneness. The personal boundaries around the work gave the feeling of safety and predictability that was essential for her to provide the conditions for the relationship to develop with the client (Burger, 1995; Rogers, 2002). The space created by aloneness

related to the client being heard, seen and experienced fully, for some participants and provided genuine openness for the client to explore their world with a companion willing to experience “the deepest thing within him or her” (Buber, in Baldwin, 2013). Although, as Buber remarked, even at this greatest relational depth equality is a challenge and will not exist due to the power dynamic inherent in the relationship.

Aloneness was expressed as providing a sense of freedom to tune in, “inside your imagination” (Jo, L1424). Another participant (Alex), said creating a space and “sitting with not knowing” (L1274) to fully receive the client and foster a deeper connection was part of his experience, this openness created, as Geller (2017) proposed, for “something bigger than both of us” (p.199). Or as Buber (In Baldwin, 2013) suggested an authentic connection generating a *spiritual electricity*. Alex suggested he wanted to be fully available to the client for meaningful encounter and discovery and as a therapist this being fundamental to the connection (Baldwin, 2013).

Building resilience in aloneness, and the strength needed to deal with what may come up in the therapeutic relationship, was one participant’s experience (Jamie) of how aloneness had impacted her. She felt space to reflect in aloneness was a preparation needed to be present and engage effectively with the client, being aware of personal vulnerabilities that may affect being there for your client (Satir, 2013).

Participants acknowledged that different and similar experiences of aloneness may arise within the relationship with the client. One participant (Jamie) stated that both parties

meet, and both experience their aloneness, physically and potentially emotionally, and at this point of coming together there is nowhere to hide. For Jamie, the counsellor is more 'equipped' to deal with these feelings and facilitate building rapport in the relationship, so "…as sessions go on that aloneness starts to fade..." (L1030). Sam became aware that her experience of aloneness in the relationship may potentially be very different from the client, acknowledging this self-awareness felt helpful and something to reflect on in her practice. Satir (2013) argued that self-awareness in the relationship was imperative.

I am mindful, these experiences of aloneness are explored from the perspective of the counsellor. I wanted to note that the client experience of this impact cannot be understood fully and as Knox (2008) suggested, each client is different and what they may need will be different. All participants demonstrated an awareness of self as therapist in the relationship, and of wanting to create a therapeutic connection for the client to explore their world from. What is little known, and cannot be shown in this study, is the experience of the client. In general, there is relatively little research on the client's understanding of the relationship (Knox, 2008; Norcross, 2010; Norcross & Lambert, 2011), so it follows that how the client experiences their aloneness, and the counsellor's, is unknown. There is potential for further research.

SELF CARE

As therapists, we may want to relate deeply with our client in our aim to connect, understand, effect change and ultimately help the client. We look after the self as

practitioners because we are the device through which our services are delivered. Participants in this study implied aloneness was related to how they look after themselves. Aloneness can be unpredictable (Long & Averill, 2003), a state of flux (Knafo, 2012) and impact our well-being if we are not in touch with our own experiences (Rogers, 1961; Hiatt, 2007). Participants shared observations that aloneness was connected to more resilience, and the more supported one was, the stronger one felt. One participant stated that resilience was part of reconnecting with inner resources, aloneness for self-care was private thinking time (Larson, 1997) and connecting outside of aloneness with companionship and things that brought comfort. Another's experience of aloneness was as a 'cushion', a reflective space when she was feeling depleted, to notice when she needed to do something different.

Summary:

This chapter has explored the seven themes that emerged from the data analysis in relation to the literature review and the question under investigation. I have given a sense of and how the personal experiences shared by the co-researchers echo each other's and mine, and how this impacts our professional life in relationship with the client. Each participant said they had learned something about themselves and gained some insight from their experience taking part in the study. I had hoped their experience would be interesting and favourable, and I felt heartened by this.

Loneliness is to be avoided. Solitude is to be sought.

(Drysdale, 2016)

Chapter VI:

Creative Synthesis:

The more I have engaged with aloneness the more I realise its complexity. My learning has been immense from this experience, especially what I absorbed and continue to process. I have come to understand more fully through the heuristic stages that this is in constant flux (Moustakas, 1990; Knafo, 2012); this is an ongoing process, not linear.

Heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) requires engagement on a different level. It requires honesty with oneself and self-disclosure (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). I immersed myself in this experience as much as I was able. I did not have the luxury of full immersion, and at times was self-judging about this. I noticed a process of engagement, disengagement (with more lonely and isolated feelings) and avoidance at times. I was not always aware of the latter until I had a period of reflection or meditation. It has not been an easy experience to be with.

I reflected on this journey through writing and engaging in creative processes (see Appendix 12) (Mouskatas, 1990). Some reflections revealed more nurturing periods and at other times challenging ones. During times of nurture there was creativity and I felt elevated by my experiences (see Appendix 13 & 14); this involved choice and space and I may have been physically alone or with others, akin to the participants expressions of

their aloneness. I was able to gain further understanding of myself and my relationship with aloneness from this perspective, and how I can recognise when I need it. To be with aloneness when it is least been welcomed has been demanding. It has felt painful and consuming. I've put *the work* (of this project) aside to reconnect with myself in a different way, to sleep, be with companions, and find some space to acknowledge and not deny the feelings.

In the therapeutic space, I experienced myself more open and had a heightened awareness to all aspects of aloneness – my experiences of feeling alone and connected in the relationship, as well as what I sensed was occurring for the client. Of course, I cannot speak for clients' experience of this. I connected with one participant's experience, feeling my senses were heightened and I was more receptive to my encounters of others' aloneness. What we take into the therapeutic space is significant. Our experiences of aloneness are profound, and part of what we carry within us as humans connecting with other humans. How can this not be important to explore and understand?

Chapter VII:

Conclusion

I have taken encouragement from the findings in this study that this question adds to the existing literature and current debate on aloneness, solitude and loneliness, and its connection to the therapeutic space. In the field of psychotherapy, the therapeutic relationship is fundamental in our engagement with clients (Rogers, 2002). There is much exploration of this relationship, yet there is little research on how the therapeutic connection is affected by it.

We live in a society where aloneness is increasing. A shared understanding of our humanity, and the depth of these experiences can only be helped by further exploration of these encounters on a personal level and in relation to others. We all experience aloneness. It is not something we can avoid. I have become more aware of its complexity. This phenomenon is unique, yet there are many commonalities as this study has shown. The distinctive nature of how we experience aloneness, and make meaning of our personal encounters with it, are challenging. That this is then taken into the therapeutic space with our clients to meet their experience, feels significant to me.

Counsellors' understanding of their aloneness impacts on the alliance with clients and does not feel an unusual question to explore. In our training we consider personal experience of beginnings, endings and how we relate, so it feels fundamental to understand how our experiences of aloneness impacts this space. This study brings

qualitative data of lived experience to not only add to the conversation, but to fill a gap in the literature and it warrants further research.

Limitations:

The limitations of the study include a novice researcher with limited time, resources, experience and knowledge of processes. The four participants in the study were self-selecting, with an existing interest in aloneness. This study was limited in size and, of course, this paper could have been far larger and that would have added greater insight to the research question. There would be some benefit in a wider study, including therapists who had not already considered their experiences of aloneness.

REFERENCES

Andersson, G., Denhov, A., Bülow, P. & Topor, A. (2014). Aloneness and loneliness – persons with severe mental illness and experiences of being alone. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 17(4), 353–365. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15017419.2014.941927

Angelou, M. (1994). *The complete collected poems of Maya Angelou*. NY: Random House.

Akerlind, O. & Hornquist, J. O. (1992). Loneliness and alcohol abuse: a review of evidences of an interplay. *Social Science and Medicine*, 34(4) 405-14.

Andrew L. Erdman (2017). The powerless therapist and the helpless borderline: acceptance, aloneness, and dyadic joining*, Psychoanalytic Social Work*, 24:(2), 114-130. https://doi/10.1080/15228878.2017.1323650

Auster, P. (1988). *The invention of solitude*. London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books.

BACP (2018). *Ethical framework for the counselling professions.* Lutterworth, United Kingdom: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

BACP (2015). *Ethical framework for the counselling professions.* Lutterworth, United Kingdom: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

BACP (2018). *Ethical guidelines for research in the counselling professions*. Lutterworth, United Kingdom: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Baldwin, M. (2013) (Ed). *The use of self in therapy*. East Sussex, United Kingdom: Routledge

Baldwin Jr, D. C. (2013). Some philosophical and psychological contribution to the use of self in therapy. In M. Baldwin (Ed.), *The use of self in therapy (*pp. 64-80). East Sussex, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Baxter, P. & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), 77-101.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: a practical guide for beginners*. London, United Kingdom: Sage.

Beal, C. (2006). Loneliness in older women: A review of the literature. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing.* 27(7), 795-81. https://doi/10.1080/01612840600781196

Bowlby, J. (2007). *A Secure Base.* Oxen, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Bourne, S. (Writer & Director). (2016). *The age of loneliness* [Television series]. London, United Kingdom: Wellpark Productions.

Bretherton, I. (1992), The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental Psychology,* 28, 759-775.

Buchholz, E. S. & Helbraun, E. (1999). A psychobiological developmental model for an "alonetime" need in infancy. *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic, 62*(2), 143-158.

Buchholz, E. (1997). *The call of solitude: alone in a world of attachment*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Burger, J. M. (1995). Individual differences in preference for solitude. *Journal of Research in Personality, 29*, 85-108.

Burkman, O. (2014, July 19). This column will change your life: just sit down and think. 'No wonder we don't dwell on what's inside: that would underline the loneliness of existence. *The Guardian, Lifestyle: Health & Fitness*.

Cain, S. (2012). *Quiet: the power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers.

Carr, E. (2009) *Hundreds and thousands: The journeys of Emily Carr.* British Columbia, Canada: Douglas & McIntyre.

Colette. (1966). *Earthly paradise: Colette's autobiography drawn from her lifetime writings.* New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux.

Coplan, R. J. & Bowker, J.C. (Eds.). (2014). *A handbook of solitude: Psychological perspectives on social isolation, social withdrawal, and being alone*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2018). *A connected Society*. London, United Kingdom: Crown copyright.

Detrixhe, J. J., Wallner Samstag, L., Penn, L. S. & Wong, P. S. (2014) A lonely idea: solitude's separation. *Psychological Research and Theory, Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 50(3), 310-331. http://doi/10.1080/00107530.2014.897853

Douglass & Moustakas, (1985) Heuristic inquiry: The internal search to know. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 25, 39-55.

Dluhy, M. (2007). An empty self: Detached aloneness within the context of individual and group therapy. *Group*, 31(1–2), 17–29. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com

Drysdale, C (Producer). (2016, May 8). *Tom Hanks: Desert island disks* [Radio Broadcast]. London, United Kingdom: British Broadcasting Corporation (2016).

Einstein, A. (2011). *Out of my later years: The Scientist, philosopher, and man portrayed through his own words*. New York, NY: Open Road Media.

Erikson, E *(1968) Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton

Etherinton, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher. Using ourselves in research.* London, United Kingdom: Jessica Kingsley.

Finlay, L. (2009). Ambiguous encounters: A relational approach to phenomenological research. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 9:1, 1-17. doi:10.1080/20797222.2009.11433983

Fischer, C. T. (2009) Bracketing in qualitative research: Conceptual and practical matters. *Psychotherapy Research*, 19(4-5), 583-590, https://doi/ 10.1080/10503300902798375

Fleet, D., Burton, A., Reeves, A. & DasGupta, M. P. (2016). A case for taking the dual role of counsellor-researcher in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 13(4), 328-346.

Fromm-Reichmann, F. (1959). Loneliness. *Psychiatry*, 22, 1-5.

Geller, S. M. (2107) *A practical guide to cultivating therapeutic presence*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8*(*4), 597-606. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu

Health Resources and Services Administration, (2019). *The loneliness epidemic*. US Department of Health and Human Resources.

Hemachandra, M. (2014) Chapter 4: Research methodology and design. (pp. 306). Retrieved from https://pdn.academia.edu/MaheshHemachandra

Huitt, W. (2007). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Educational Psychology Interactive*. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University. Retrieved from http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/regsys/maslow.htm

Jaglom, H., Simonson, M. H., Wolinsky, J. (Producers), & Jaglom, H. (Director). (1987). *Someone to love.* [Motion Picture]. United States: Castle Hill Productions.

Johnstone, L. & Boyle, M. with Cromby, J., Dillon, J., Harper, D., Kinderman, P., Longden, E., Pilgrim, D. & Read, J. (2018). *The power threat meaning framework: Towards the identification of patterns in emotional distress, unusual experiences and troubled or troubling behaviour, as an alternative to functional psychiatric diagnosis.* Leicester, United Kingdom: British Psychological Society.

Jootun D., & McGhee, G., Marland, G. R. (2009). Reflexivity: promoting rigour in qualitative research. *Nursing Standard. 23(23), 42046.*

Jowett, B. (1999) *Politics*. *Aristotle*. Kitchener, Ontario, Canada: Batoche Books.

Kenny G (2012). An introduction to Moustakas's heuristic method. *Nurse Researcher* 19(3), 6-11.

Kisely, S., & Kendall, E. (2011) Critically appraising qualitative research: a guide for clinicians more familiar with quantitative techniques. *Australasian Psychiatry,* 19(4), 364-7. http://doi.org/10.3109/10398562.2011.562508.

Kleining, G., Witt, H., (2000). The qualitative heuristic approach: A methodology for discovery in psychology and the social sciences. Rediscovering the method of introspection as an example. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research***,** 1(1), 13. http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-1.1.1123

Knafo, D. (2012a). Alone together: Solitude and the creative encounter in art and psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 22(1), 54. http://doi.org/10.1080/10481885.2012.646605

Knafo, D. (2012) Solitude and relatedness: A wily and complex twinship: Reply to commentaries, *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 22:1, 83-92. https://doi.org/10.1080/10481885.2012.646612

Knox, R. (2008). Client's experiences of relational depth in person-centred counselling. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 8(3), 182-188. http://doi:10.1080/14733140802035005.

Kubistant, T. M. (1981). Resolutions of aloneness. *Personnel & Guidance Journal*, 59(7), 461. Retrieved from: http://search.ebscohost.com.

Larson, R. W. (1990). The solitary side of life: An examination of the time people spend alone from childhood to old age. *Developmental Review, 10*, 155-183. http://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297(90)90008.

Larson, R. W. (1997). The emergence of solitude as a constructive domain of experience in early adolescence. *Child Development, 68*, 80-93.

Leary, M. R., C. Herbst, K. C., and McCrary, F. (2002). *Finding pleasure in solitary activities: a desire for aloneness or disinterest in social contact?* Wake Forest & St. Joseph's University, USA Department of Psychology.

Leary, M. R., Herbst, K. C., & McCrary, F. (2003). Finding pleasure in solitary activities: Desire for aloneness or disinterest in social contact? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 35, 59-68. http://doi.org/10.1016/S0191- 8869(02)00141-1.

Liebke, L., Bungert, M., Thome, J., Hauschild, S., Gescher, D. M., Schmahl, C., Lis, S., and Bohus, M., (2017) Loneliness, social networks, and social functioning in borderline personality disorder. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 8(4), 349–356.

Long, C. L., Averill, J. R. (2003) Solitude: An exploration of benefits of being alone. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 33(1). http://doi.org/10.1111.1468-5914.00204

Little, S. (2015) Between silence and words: The therapeutic dimension of quiet. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 51(1), 31-50. http://DOI.org/10.1080/00107530.2015.968833

Lincoln, Y. S., and Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications

Maes, M., Vanhalst, J., Spithoven, A. W., Van den Nootgate, W., Goossens, L. (2015) Loneliness and attitudes toward aloneness in adolescence: A person-centered approach. *Youth Adolescence*, 45(3), 547-67. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-03545

Maykut, P., and Morehouse, R (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: a philosophical and practical guide*. London, United Kingdom: Falmer Press.

Maitland, S. (2014). *How to be alone*: London: McMillan.

McLeod, J. (2015). *Doing research in counselling and psychotherapy* (3rd ed). London, United Kingdom: Sage.

McLeod, J (2011). *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy*. London, United Kingdom: Sage.

McLeod, J. (2004). *An introduction to counselling* (3rd ed). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Mohr, A. M. (2008). Reflections on tinnitus by an existential psychologist. *Audiological Medicine*, 6(73), 77.

Morse J.M., Barrett M., Mayan M., Olson K. & Spiers J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research*. International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 1(2), 1–19.

Moustakas, C. & Moustakas, K. (2004). *Loneliness, creativity & love: Awakening meanings in life*. United States: XLibris.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research. Design, methodology, and applications.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Moustakas, C. (1972). *Loneliness and love.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Moustakas, C. (1961). *Loneliness.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Nguyen, T., Weinstein, N. & Ryan, R. (Manuscript submitted for publication, last reviewed Jan 29). *Identifying personality characteristics associated with the capacity to be alone using big-five theory, attachment theory, and self-determination theory*. University of Rochester New York, United States, Cardiff University, United Kingdom.

Norcross, J. C. (2010). The therapeutic relationship. In B. L. Duncan, S. D. Miller, B. E. Wampold, & M. A. Hubble (Eds.), *The heart and soul of change: Delivering what works in therapy* (2nd ed.) (pp. 113-141). American Psychological Association. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/12075-004

Norcross, J. C., & Lambert, M. J. (2011). Psychotherapy relationships that work II. *Psychotherapy, 48*(1), 4-8. http://doi.org/10.1037/a0022180

O'Donohue, J. (1999*) 'For courage'*. In eternal echoes. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Office for National Statistics (2018). *Loneliness - What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely? Analysis of characteristics and circumstances associated with loneliness in England using the Community Life Survey, 2016 to 2017.*

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2007). Sampling designs in qualitative research: making the sampling process more public. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(2), 238-254. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.

Osho (2001). *Love, freedom, aloneness: The koan of relationships*. New York, NY: Osho International Foundation.

Paul, S. & Haugh, S. (2008). (Eds) *The therapeutic relationship: Perspectives and themes.* Ross-on-Wye, United Kingdom: PCCS Books.

Phillips, A. (2007). *Winnicott*. London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books.

Pierce, L. L., Wilkinson, L. K. & Anderson, J. (2003) Analysis of the concept of aloneness: As applied to older women being treated for depression. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*. 29(7), 20-25.

Pinkerton, R (2008). "I apologize for being late": the courteous psychotherapist". *Psychotherapy Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 45 (2), 273–277; DOI: 10.1037/0033-3204.45.2.273. Duke University: American Psychological Association

Postlewaite, M. (2018) *Clearing*. Retrieved from https://habitsforwellbeing.com.

Pragito. D. (2017). *The blog. Loneliness vs. aloneness: What's the difference?* Retrieved from Huffpost.com.

Qualter, P., Vanhalst, J., Harris, R.A., Lodder, G., Bangee, M., Van Roekel, E., Verhagen, M. & Maes, M. (2015). Loneliness across the lifespan. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10,250-264. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615568999

Rogers, C. R. (2002). *On becoming a person*. *A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London, United Kingdom: Constable

Rokach, A. (2004). Loneliness then and now: Reflections of social and emotional alienation in everyday life. *Current Psychology*; 23 (1), 24-40. http://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-004-1006-1.

Rokach, A. (2012). Loneliness updated: An introduction. *The Journal of Psychology*, 146(1-2), 1-6. http://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2012.629501

Rutherford, R., & Washbourne. (Producers). (2012). *All in the mind* [Radio broadcast]. London, United Kingdom: British Broadcasting Corporation.

Rubenstein, C. & Shaver, P. (1982). The experience of loneliness. In L.A. Peplau & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Loneliness: A source book of current theory, and therapy.* New York, NY: Wiley.

Rufus, A. (2003). *Party of one: ThelLoners' manifesto*. New York, NY: Avalon.

Ryan, R. M. & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness.* New York**,** NY: The Guilford Press.

Sartre, J. P. (2012) *Essays in aesthetics*. London, United Kingdom: Open Road Media.

Satir, V. (2013) The therapist story. In M. Baldwin (Ed.) *The use of self in therapy* (pp. 19-27). East Sussex, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Spillers, C. S. (2007). An existential framework for understanding the counseling needs of clients. *American Journal of Speech - Language Pathology*. Nursing & Allied Health Database, 16(3), 191.

Stafford, W., & Poets Laureate Collection (Library of Congress). (1998). *The way it is: New & selected poems*. Saint Paul, Minn: Graywolf Press.

Straub, D., Boudreau, MC. & Gefen, D. (2004). Validation guidelines for IS positivist research. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems,* 13(24). https://DOI.org/10.17705/1CAIS.01324

Srivastava, S., Angelo, K. M. & Vallereux, S. R. (2008). Extraversion and positive affect: A day reconstruction study of person-environment transactions. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42, 1613-1618.

Storr, A. (1997) *Solitude*. London, United Kingdom: Harper Collins.

Suedfeld, P. (1982). Aloneness as a healing experience. In L. A. Peplau & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Loneliness: A sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy (pp. 54-65)*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Thomas, V. (2017) *How to be Alone.* (PhD thesis). University of California, Santa Cruz, CA: ProQuest.

Tongco, M. (2007). Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection. *Ethnobotany Research and Applications, 5*, 147-158. Retrieved from http://journals.sfu.ca.

Van Zyl, C., Danckaert, E. & Guse, T. (2018). Motivation for solitude: A cross-cultural examination of adolescents from collectivist and individualist cultures in South Africa. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 27:697–706. Springer Science and Business Media. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0916-0

Wachtel, P. L. (2008). *Relational theory and the practice of psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. (3rd ed.). Berkshire, United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. Adventures in theory and method. Berkshire, United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Williams, L. (2017). *Understanding the potential of solitude*. Unpublished Master of Counselling thesis. City University of Seattle: Vancouver, Canada

Witt, H., Kleining, G. (2000). The qualitative heuristic approach: A methodology for discovery in psychology and the social sciences. *Rediscovering the Method of Introspection as an Example*, 1(1), 13.

Winnicott, D. W. (1958). The capacity to be alone. In D.W. Winnicott (Ed.), *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment* (pp. 29-36). London, United Kingdom: Karnac Books.

Yalom, I. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Zelenski, J.M., Sobocko, K. and Whelan, D.C. (2014). Introversion, solitude, and subjective well-being. In R. J. Coplan, & J. Bowker (Eds.), *The handbook of solitude: Psychological perspectives on social isolation, social withdrawal, and being alone* (pp. 184-201). Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. http://doi.org/10.1002/9781118427378

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Advert

University of Chester

Are you interested in exploring:

ALONENESS?

I am looking for participants to take part in a qualitative study on their experiences of 'aloneness' and any impact on the therapeutic relationship. I am a postgraduate student in my final year of a post-qualifying MA in Counselling Studies. My research question**:**

THE COUNSELLOR'S EXPERIENCE OF *ALONENESS* AND ITS IMPACT ON THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP
A HEURISTIC STUDY

I am looking for participants who:

- *have an interest in their experience of* ***aloneness***
- *are willing to take part in a face to face interview (approx. 60-90 mins)*
- *are qualified counsellors/psychotherapists*
- *are currently in supervised practice*
- *have at least 3 years post qualifying supervised practice or 300 hours counselling practice*

If you are interested in this subject please contact me at the email below for further information.

Thanks for your time.

EMAIL: ……..@chester.ac.uk

APPENDIX 2: Participant Check List

Department Of Social And Political Studies (University Of Chester)
Masters Degree In Counselling Studies

RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE OF STUDY:

THE COUNSELLOR'S EXPERIENCE OF ALONENESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP:
A HEURISTIC STUDY

CHECKLIST FOR PARTICIPANTS

- An interest in ***aloneness*** ☐
- Qualified ☐
- More than 3 years qualified (or 300+ hours) ☐
- Currently practicing ☐
- Member of professional body ☐
- Fluent level of spoken English language ☐

Please return to: ……@chester.ac.uk

APPENDIX 3: Pre-Interview Questions

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL & POLITICAL SCIENCE

UNIVERITY OF CHESTER

TITLE OF STUDY: THE COUNSELLOR'S EXPERIENCE OF ALONENESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP - A HEURISTIC STUDY

PARTICIPANT PERSONAL DETAILS & RELEVANT INFORMATION

NAME:	
TELEPHONE NUMBERS:	
EMAIL:	
METHOD OF CONTACT PREFERRED: (PLEASE STATE)	
PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH RESEARCHER?	YES/NO
QUALIFIED COUNSELLOR?	YES/NO
TOTAL YEARS OF PRACTICE?	
TOTAL HOURS OF PRACTICE?	

PROFESSIONAL BODY?	
CURRRENTLY PRACTICING AND RECEIVING COUNSELLING SUPERVISION?	YES/NO
DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO PERSONAL THERAPY?	YES/NO
DO YOU HAVE AN INTEREST IN ALONENESS?	YES/NO
OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION:	

APPENDIX 4: Participant Information Sheet

University of Chester

RESEARCH STUDY - INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Department of Social and Political Studies (University Of Chester)
MA in Counselling Studies

TITLE OF STUDY: ***THE COUNSELLOR'S EXPERIENCE OF ALONENESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP: A HEURISTIC STUDY.***

Firstly, thank you for replying and expressing an interest in my study.
It is my hope that you have responded because you are interested in the question and have an interest in exploring ***your experience of aloneness***, in relation to your counselling work with clients, and the therapeutic relationship created. I am inviting you to take part in this qualitative study as part of my post qualifying MA at the University of Chester. I have provided information about the study below, but if there are further questions do not hesitate to contact me.

- ***NAME*** : .....@chester.ac.uk

About *me* as your researcher - I am an experienced and qualified person-centred counsellor and supervisor. I have been practicing for more than ten years. I work with adults, children and young people and have experience in different therapeutic settings.

Purpose of the Study: My interest in this topic began as a personal one and has extended into my professional practice and to others' experiences of the phenomena. It comes from a desire to understand aloneness more; how it affects us individually and in relation to our connections with others, and more specifically for this study, in relation to clients.

Can I be part of the study? I would like participants to have some experience of practice post-qualifying, to have some reflective practice and experience to draw upon. I would ask prospective participants to consider their suitability and to have thought about their own experiences of being alone or aloneness. You must:

- be a qualified counsellor
- be a member of a professional counselling body
- be currently practicing as a therapist
- have access to personal therapy
- have experience of at least 3 years post qualifying supervised practice or 300+ counselling hours.

What might exclude me?

- **If we know each other in a personal or professional capacity (this is to avoid dual relationships)**

How will I be selected? I have attached a checklist for participants to complete and return to me via email. Once received, I will contact you via email to let you know about further arrangements for the study and to

organise an interview time and place convenient for you. *If you do not meet the criteria, or I am oversubscribed, I will contact you to let you know within a fortnight of receiving your reply*.
What will the interview process involve? Before the interview takes place I will check you understand the study process and obtain permission to make the recording. The interview will be 60-90 minutes in length. I am anticipating asking no more than six questions, with a view to facilitating a free flow of your experience where possible. The questions will be about your unique experience of aloneness - in your personal life and professional practice.

Confidentiality, anonymity and ethical considerations: I will offer a safe space to share your thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences on aloneness. Exploring this subject may bring up unexpected feelings and emotions, and to this end I will provide information on organisations for further support following the interview process. I will respect the autonomy of experienced practitioners to access support as they see fit. In order to protect confidentiality and adhere to ethical guidelines there will be a 'consent to record' and confidentiality agreement to sign. I will require written consent from all participants who agree to take part.

- Your anonymity will be protected both in terms of data collected and recorded, and in the final study findings.
- All recording will be locked in a filing cabinet, and personal information will be held separate to recorded material.
- You will be given a code or pseudonym in transcriptions of the interviews and computer information will be password protected.

What are the potential benefits of participating in the study? This is an opportunity to explore experiences of aloneness and gain further insight into your personal journey and practice, as well as contributing to a wider discussion as part of this study. There are no guarantees, but you may feel a sense of satisfaction with this, and in general by taking part in this study.

What are the risks of taking part? It is your decision to take part in the study on a voluntary basis. However, taking part may bring up unexpected feelings and emotions as we will be exploring potential sensitive areas of your personal and professional life, and this is something to reflect on before agreeing to take part in the study. To this end, you may need the support of your supervisor, and/or have access to sources of support including personal therapy. Information about therapists local to you can be found via the BACP 'Find a **T**herapist' website, and the Counselling Directory.

What if I want to withdraw? Participants will be able to withdraw from the study, without reprisal, at any time up to completion of the first draft of the dissertation, and I will write to you to let you know the date of this. However, after this point it will not be possible. If a participant decides to withdraw, any information will be destroyed.

The timescale of the study: I am looking to interview participants between
June and the end of August, 2018**. There will be a transcript available for you to read following the interview. The timescale for this will be discussed at our meeting.

Concerns and Complaints process: Any complaints will be taken to the research supervisor, Dr Rita Mintz, Programme leader MA in Counselling Studies, in the first instance. If this is not satisfactory then it will be taken to the Dean of Faculty, Social & Political Science at the University of Chester.
In the unlikely event that participants are harmed by the research, there are no special compensation arrangements (University of Chester Research Handbook, 2014).

Thanks again for contacting me. Please feel free to contact me if you require further information. If after reading this you have decided not to take part, I thank you for your time. If you would like to continue as part of this study, please return the attached checklist and I will be in touch with you again within 2 weeks.

Warm regards,
email: ……@chester.ac.uk

APPENDIX 5: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

MA COUNSELLING STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

THE COUNSELLOR'S EXPERIENCE OF ALONENESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP
A HEURISTIC STUDY

QUESTIONS FOR SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. **WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE OF ALONENESS?**

   a. *How would you say you have experienced aloneness?*
   b. *In what ways, if any, have you explored your experiences of aloneness?*

2. **HOW HAS ALONENESS AFFECTED YOUR LIFE***?*

   a. *What has it meant/does it mean to you?*
   b. *Has aloneness felt positive/negative/both? Can you give some examples?*

3. **WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE OF ALONENESS BEEN IN THE COUNSELLING ROOM?**

   a. *In what way, if any, has aloneness and your experience of this affected you in relation to your work with clients?*
   b. *Can you think of some examples of these experiences?*

4. **HOW HAS ALONENESS AFFECTED THE THERAPURTIC RELATIONSHIP?**

   a. *In what ways, if any, do you feel aloneness has affected or impacted on the therapeutic relationship?*
   b. *How has your experience of aloneness affected you as a practitioner?*
   c. *Could you give some examples of your experiences?*

APPENDIX 6: Letter/Email To Participants Selected

Addressee: (participants selected)

Dear xxxxxx

RE: RESEARCH STUDY

Thank you for your response to my research study on 'aloneness', and for completing the pre-interview questionnaire. I very much appreciate your time and willingness to share your thoughts.

I am writing to let you know that you are being invited to take part in the study. The next stage is to arrange where the interview will take place, and when. This can be local to you, local to me in (……), or at the University of Chester. I would be grateful if you could let me know your preferred location.

I am unavailable between (DATES), otherwise I am usually available (TIMES) and with some weekend availability.

Thank you again for your interest in my study and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

(NAME)

APPENDIX 7: Participant Consent Form

M. A. in Counselling Studies Research
University of Chester

Consent Form: Audio/Digital Recording of Interview

Title of Study: ……

…….

I ……. hereby give consent for the details of a written transcript based on an audio/digital recorded interview with me and…….. .. to be used in preparation and as part of a research dissertation for the M.A. in Counselling Studies at the University of Chester. I understand that my identity will remain anonymous and that all personally identifiable information will remain confidential and separate from the research data. I further understand that the transcript may be seen by Counselling Tutors and the External Examiner for the purpose of assessment and moderation. I also understand that all these individuals are bound by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

I understand that I will have access to the transcribed material and would be able to delete or amend any part of it. I am aware that I can stop the interview at any time or ultimately withdraw the interview, without giving a reason or explanation, at any point before the submission of the dissertation. Upon satisfactory completion of the M.A. in Counselling Studies the recording will be securely destroyed. The transcripts and related data will be securely stored for a period of five years, by me, the researcher, and then destroyed.

Excerpts from the transcript will be included in the dissertation. A copy of the dissertation will be held in the Department of Social & Political Science and may be made available electronically through Chester Rep, the University's online research repository.

Without my further consent some of the material may be used for publication and/or presentations at conferences and seminars. Every effort will be made to ensure complete anonymity.

Finally, I confirm I have read and understood the attached Information Sheet and was given the opportunity for further explanation by the researcher. I believe I have been given sufficient information about the nature of this research, including any possible risks, to give my informed consent to participate.

Signed [Participant]…….……

Name - Please Print……..

Date ……

Signed [Researcher] ……..……..

Name - Please Print……..…….

Date…….....

APPENDIX 8: Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising with your data:	Transcribing data, reading/rereading noting initial ideas from the data.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting descriptions of the data and collating relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating potential themes and all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking themes work in relation to the coded extracts and generating a thematic "map"of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Continuation of analysis to refine each theme, generating clear definitions/names for each.
6. Producing the report:	Selection of rich extract examples, checking and relating back to the research question literature

(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 35)

APPENDIX 9: 15-Point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription		
	1	Transcription to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts checked for "accuracy".
Coding		
	2	Each data item when coded has been given equal attention.
	3	Themes have been from a thorough coding process.
	4	All relevant extracts for all themes have been collated.
	5	Data from themes have been checked and rechecked back to the original data set.
	6	"Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive".
Analysis		
	7	Data analysed and interpreted thoroughly – not just "paraphrased or described".
	8	Analysis and data match and " the extracts illustrate the analytic claims".
	9	Analysis tells a clear and "well-organised story" about the issues under examination.
	10	"A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided".
Overall		
	11	The process for exploring and examinating the data has been allocated time "to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly".
	12	"The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are explicated".

Written report clearly	13	Consistency in approach and outcome - " a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done".
	14	"The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis".
	15	Evident that the researcher is "active in the research process" and this is apparent.

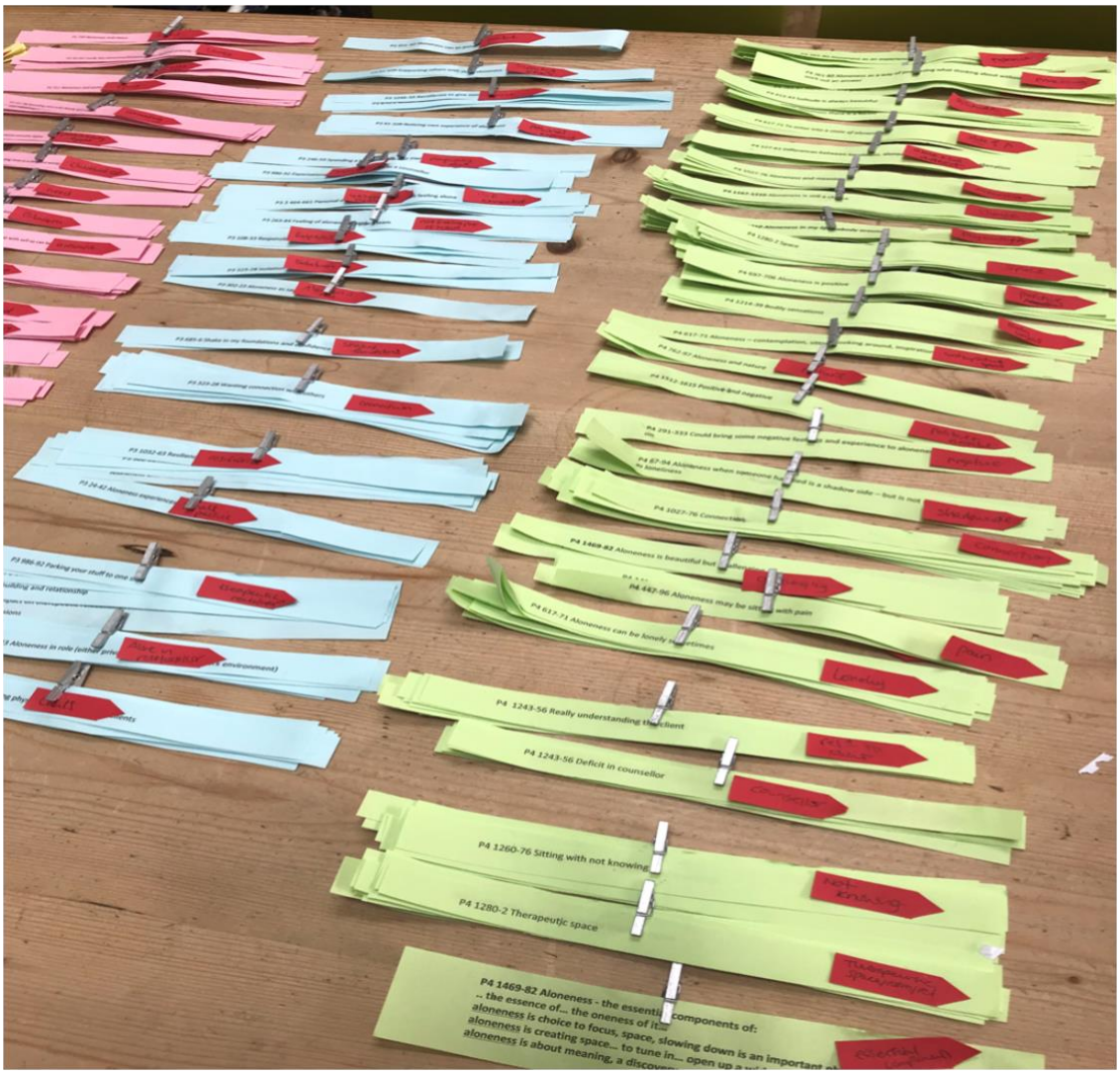
(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 36)

APPENDIX 10: Advantages of Thematic Analysis

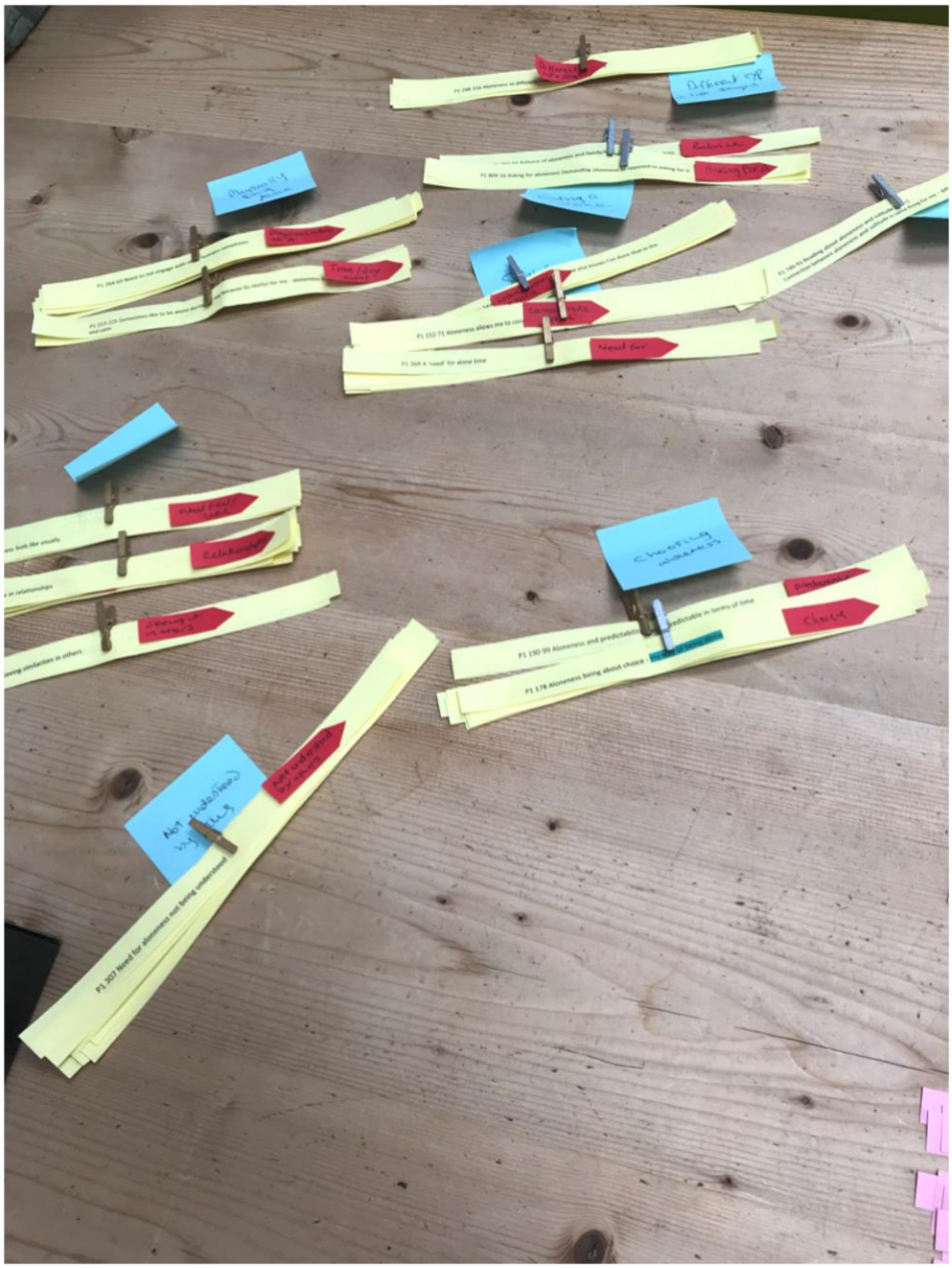
- Flexibility.
- Relatively easy and quick method to learn and do.
- Accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research.
- Results are generally accessible to educated general public.
- Useful method for working within participatory research paradigm, with participants as collaborators.
- Can usefully summarise key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a „thick description" of the
- data set.
- Can highlight similarities and differences across the data set.
- Can generate unanticipated insights.
- Allows for social as well as psychological interpretations of data.
- Can be useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development.

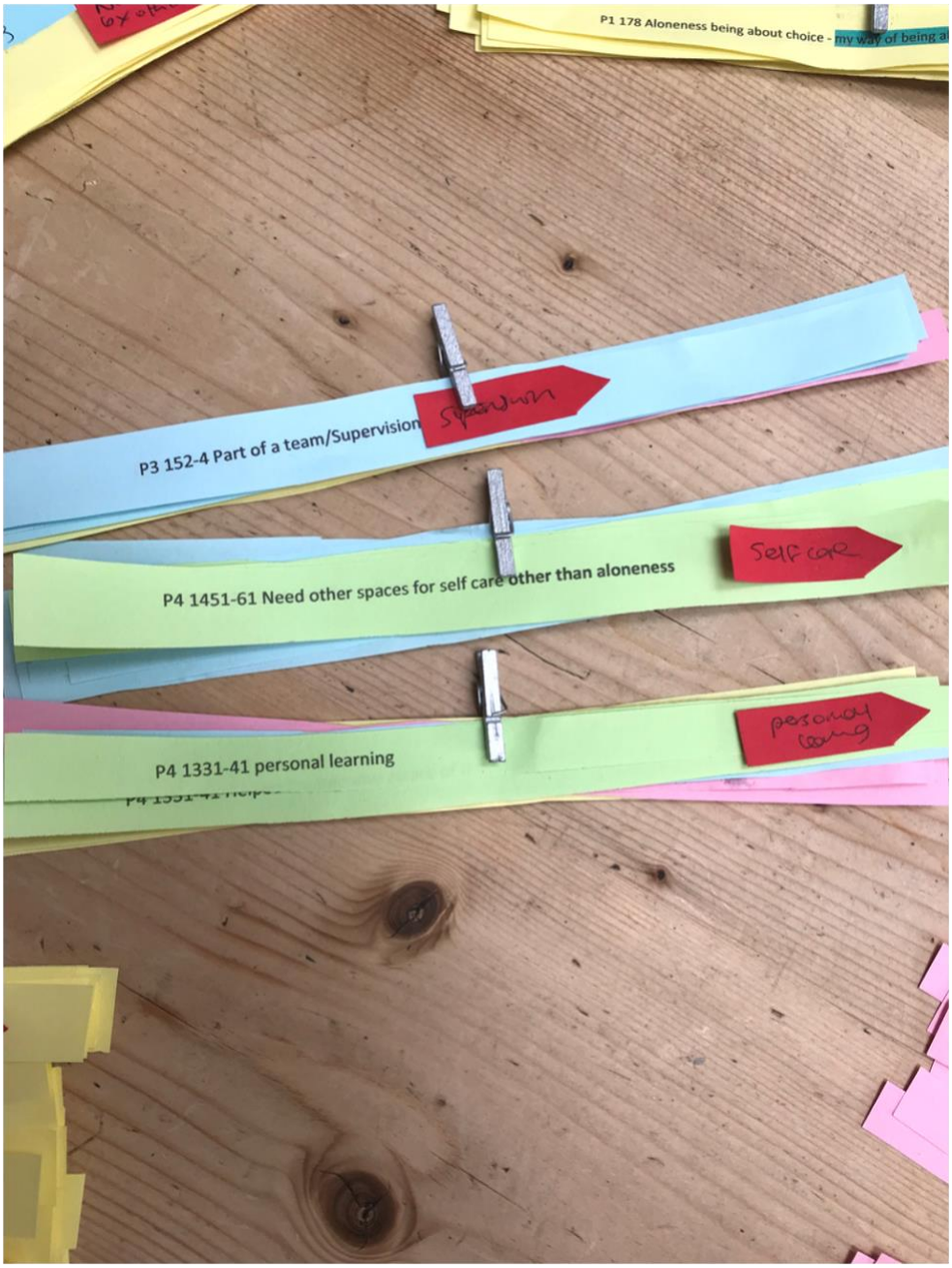
(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 37)

APPENDIX 11: Long-listed Coding (4 pictures)

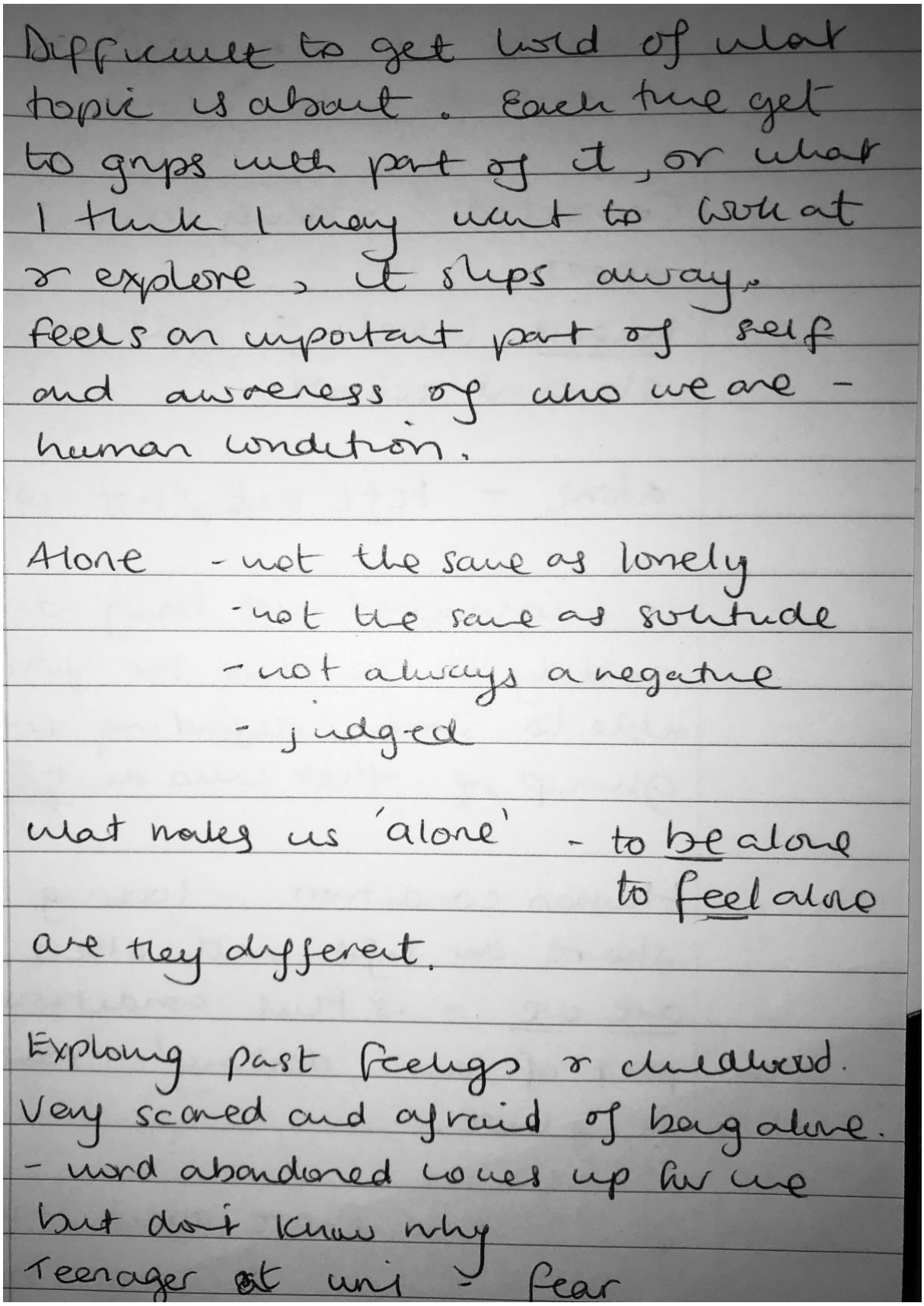



P3 685-6 Shake in my foundations and confidence
P3 323-28 Wanting connection with others
P3 1032-63 Resilience
P3 24-42 Aloneness experience
P3 986-92 Parking your stuff to one side
building and relationship
P3 108-33 Aloneness in role (either private
environment)
P3 132-3 Aloneness being phys
clients
and how clients are


Need for
Need for
Need for


P1 178 Aloneness being about choice -
P3 152-4 Part of a team/Supervision
Supervision
P4 1451-61 Need other spaces for self care other than aloneness
Self care
P4 1331-41 personal learning
personal caring

APPENDIX 12: Extracts From Diary And Journals During Heurist Process (2017-2019)



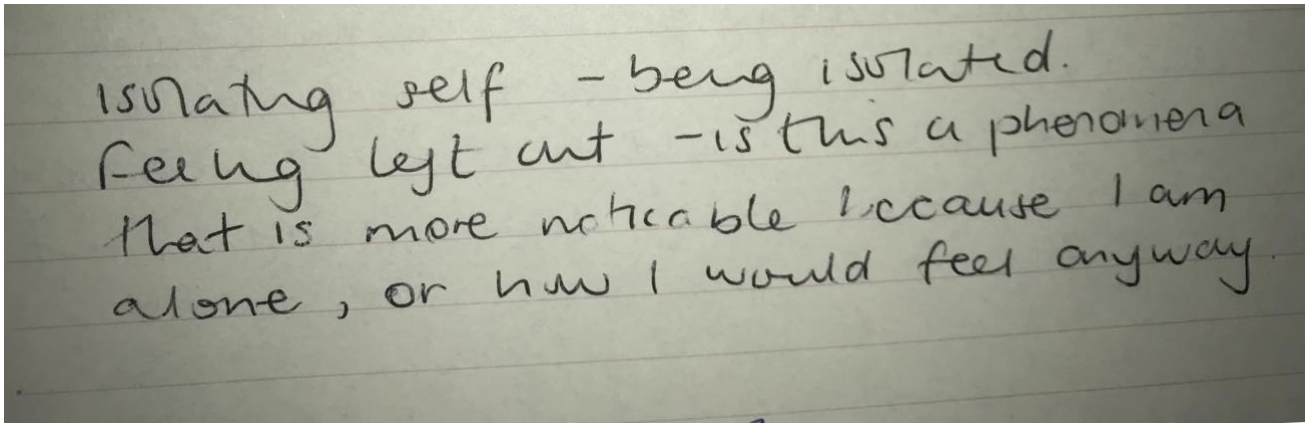
Difficult to get hold of what topic is about. Each time get to grips with part of it, or what I think I may want to look at or explore, it slips away. feels an important part of self and awareness of who we are - human condition.

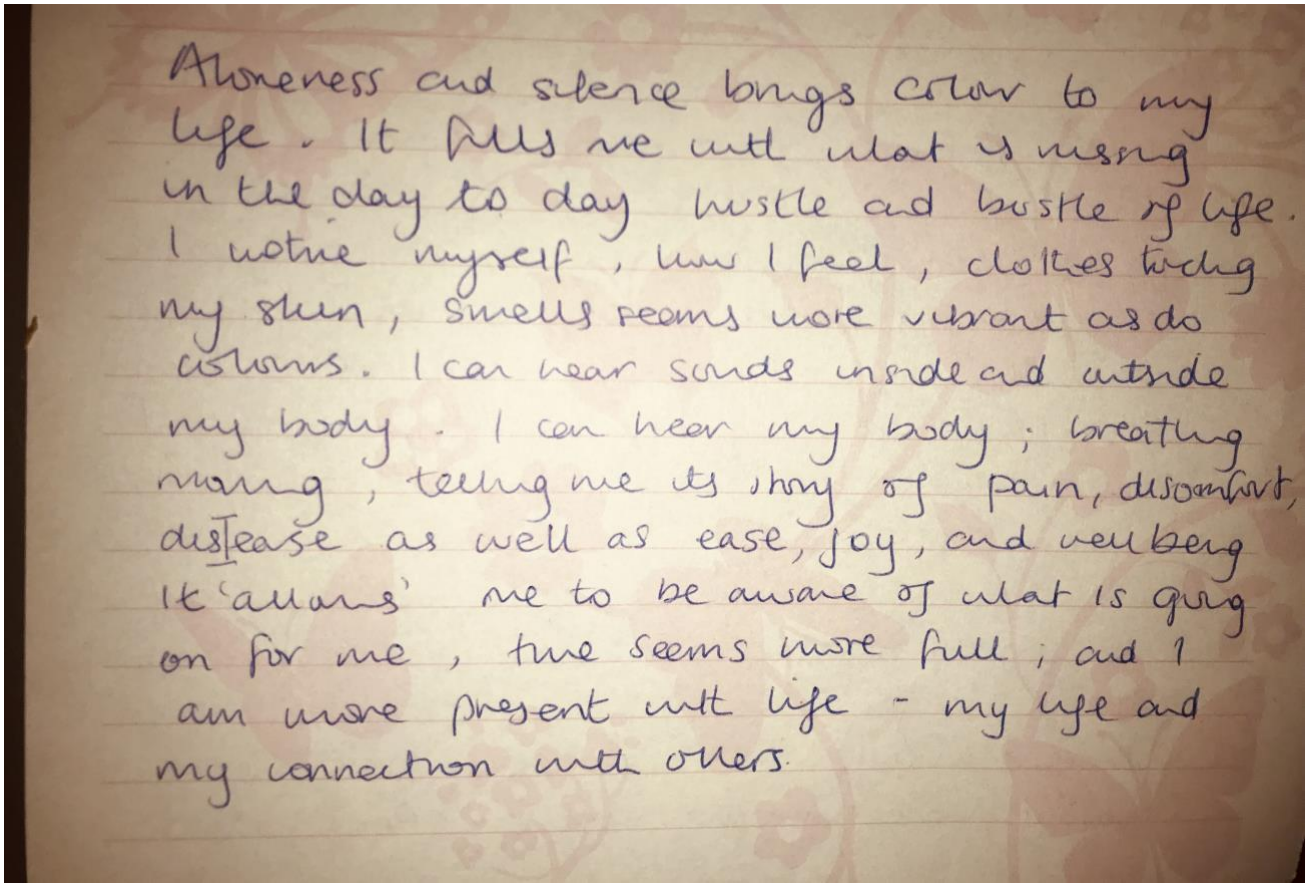
Alone - not the same as lonely
- not the same as solitude
- not always a negative
- judged

what makes us 'alone' - to be alone
to feel alone

are they different.

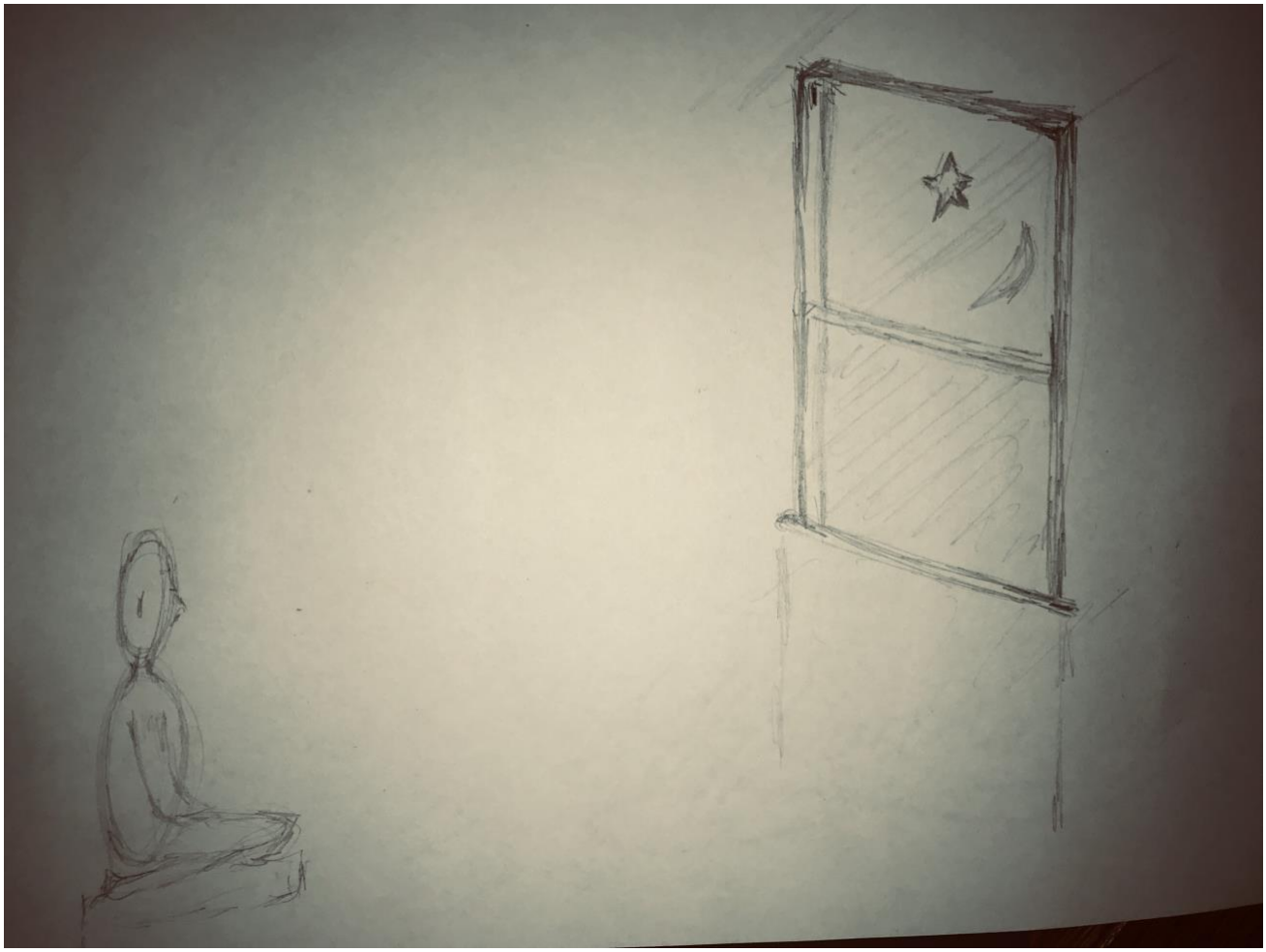
Exploring past feelings & childhood.
Very scared and afraid of being alone.
- word abandoned comes up for me
but don't know why
Teenager at uni = fear


isolating self - being isolated.
Feeling left out - is this a phenomena
that is more noticable because I am
alone, or how I would feel anyway.


Aloneness and silence brings color to my
life. It fills me with what is missing
in the day to day hustle and bustle of life.
I notice myself, how I feel, clothes touching
my skin, smells seems more vibrant as do
colours. I can hear sounds inside and outside
my body. I can hear my body; breathing
moving, telling me its story of pain, discomfort,
dis-ease as well as ease, joy, and well being
It 'allows' me to be aware of what is going
on for me, time seems more full; and I
am more present with life - my life and
my connection with others.

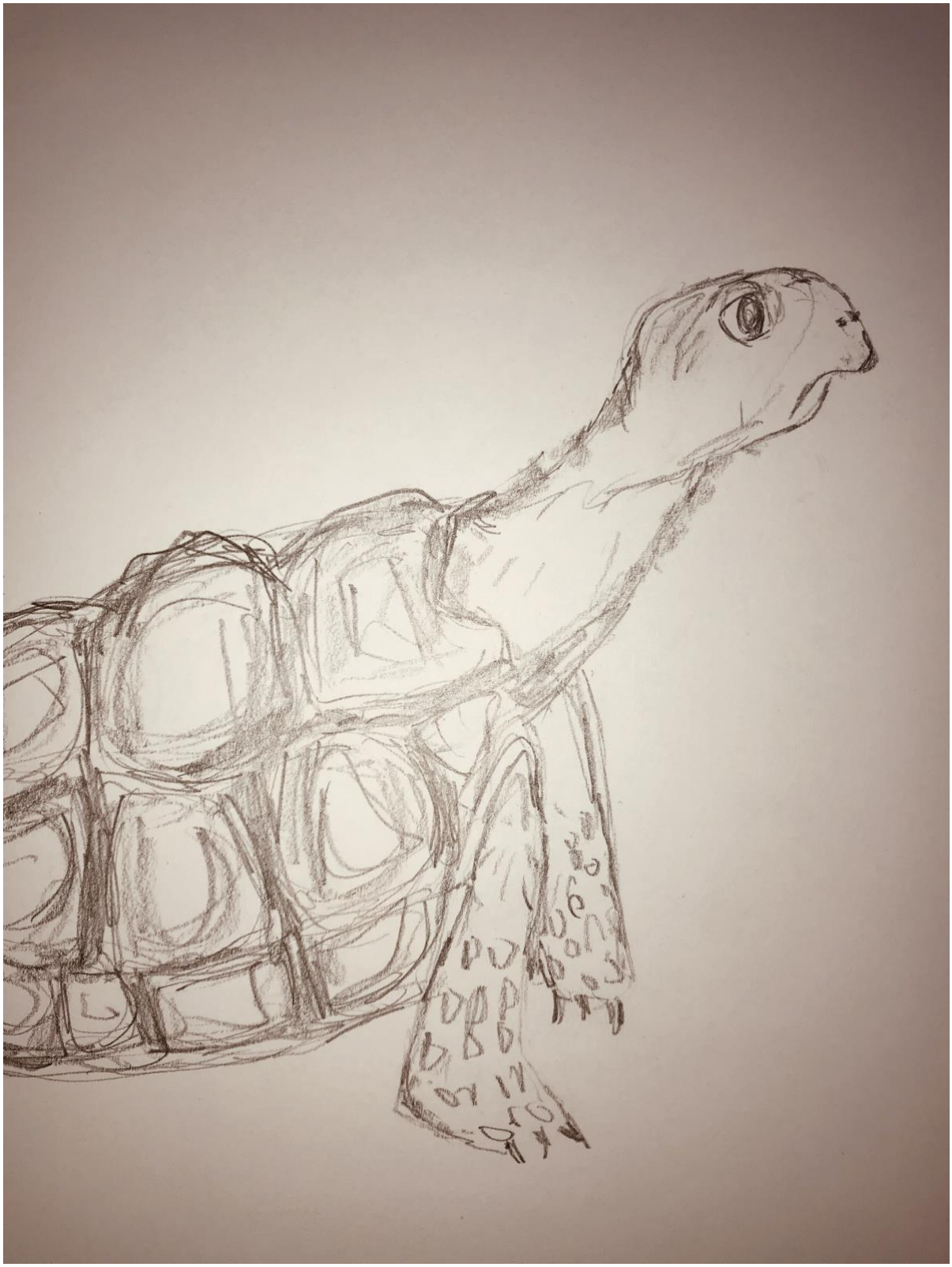
APPENDIX 12: Drawing and Sketches during Heuristic Process (2017-19)

Times of creativity and beneficial experiences:



APPENDIX 13: Drawing and Sketches during Heuristic Process (2017-19)

Times of contemplation and meditation:



APPENDIX 13: Drawing and Sketches during Heuristic Process From (2017-19)

Times of struggle and isolation in experiences:

APPENDIX 14:

Alone

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.
There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Maya Angelou (1994)

EPILOGUE

Clearing

Do not try to save

the whole world

or do anything grandiose.

Instead, create

a clearing

in the dense forest

of your life

and wait there

patiently,

until the song

that is your life

falls into your open cupped hands

and you recognize and greet it….

Martha Postlethwaite